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THE

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SERMONS PREACHED AND REVISED

BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

DURING THE YEAR 1890.

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C. H. Spurgeon in 1890.

TO

THE ONE GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH,

IN

THE TRINITY OF HIS SACRED PERSONS,

BE ALL HONOUR AND GLORY

WORLD WITHOUT END,

AMEN.

TO THE GLORIOUS FATHER, AS THE COVENANT GOD OF ISRAEL;

TO THE GRACIOUS SON, THE REDEEMER OF HIS PEOPLE;

TO THE HOLY GHOST, THE AUTHOR OF SANCTIFICATION;

BE EVERLASTING PRAISE FOR THAT GOSPEL OF THE FREE GRACE OF GOD

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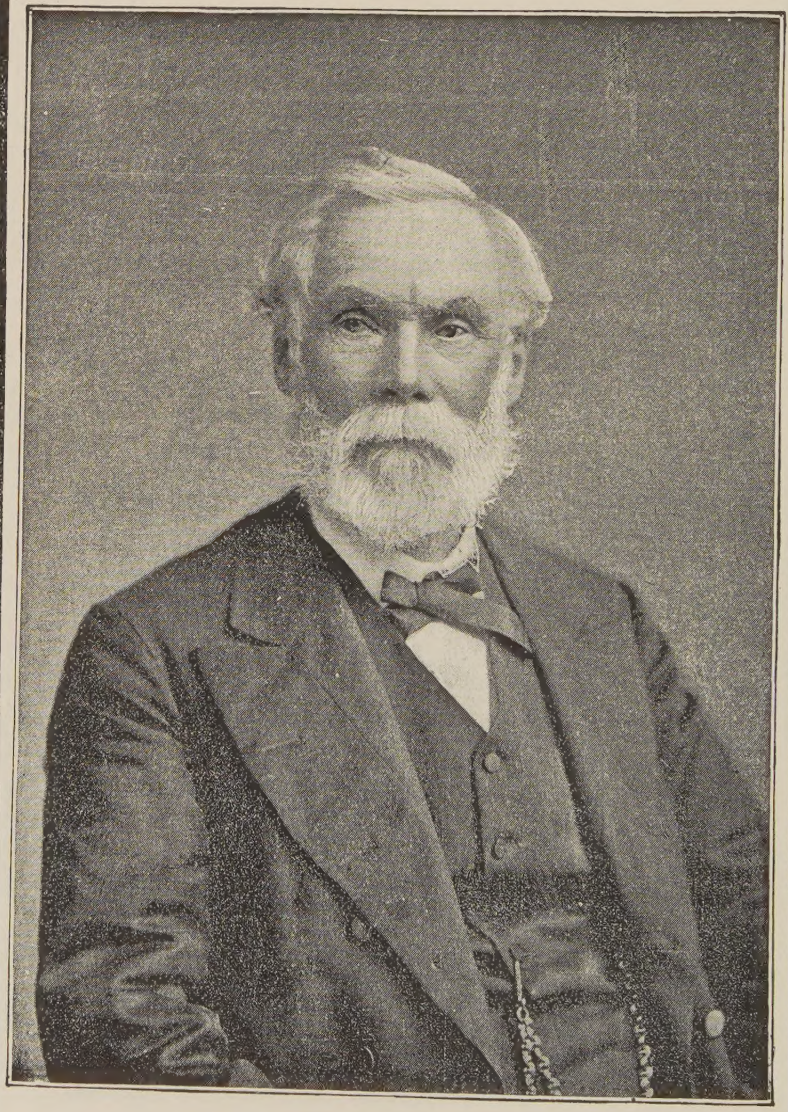

DEACON WILLIAM OLNEY.

Born, May 10th, 1821.

Went Home, October 17th, 1890.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE KEYNOTE OF THE YEAR.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 5TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, March 7th, 1889.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name."—Psalm ciii. 1.

BEFORE our friend who leads us in singing begins, we sometimes hear his tuning-fork. He is getting the keynote into his ear. When he comes forward, he often sounds out that keynote before he begins to sing. This is what David does in this wonderful psalm. He sounds the tuning-fork with this clear note—"Bless the Lord, O my soul." It is well for all to be ready to sing harmoniously: it is a pity when those who gather to worship do not know what they are at. I wish I could always have you spiritually in tune, and keep in tune myself. Alas! I fear we are often half a note too flat. The words before us are the keynote of this psalm, and all the music is set to it, and closes with it. Notice that the psalm begins, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," and it ends in the same way, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," as if to show us that praise is the Alpha and the Omega of a Christian life. Praise is the life of life. So we begin; so we continue; so shall we end, world without end. This psalm has just as many verses in the original as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It is an alphabetical psalm as to number, and so I may say that the A of it is "Bless the Lord, O my soul," and the Z of it is "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Oh, that our infancy would bless the Lord, and our childhood and our youth bless the Lord, and our manhood and our old age bless the Lord! From the cradle to the tomb one line of sapphire, one streak of sparkling crystal should run through the entire mass of life—and that should be praise unto God.

"I would begin the music here,
And so my soul should rise;
Oh, for some heavenly notes to bear
My passions to the skies!"

Oh, to have heaven's employment and heaven's enjoyment here below by never-ceasing praise! We need never make a pause in that of which we shall never make an end.

As I said in the exposition, there is no prayer in this psalm: it is all praise right through. There are times in a Christian's life when he feels as if praise employed the whole of his faculties, and his own wants and faults and all about himself sank into insignificance. Usually we mix prayer and praise, and they make up a delightful incense of mingled fragrance; but sometimes, when on Tabor's top we stand transfigured with the light of God's goodness, all we can do is to praise his name. All that is within us is blessing him, and there is no faculty left with which to pray him to bless us. This is an anticipation of the occupation and enjoyment of heaven, where for ever and for ever we shall bless and praise and magnify the Thrice-holy God.

At this time I pray that, while I talk about this verse, I may be carrying it out; and may you be each one carrying it out, too, if, indeed, the Lord has blessed you! Let us preach and hear with harps in our hands, and songs in our hearts. If I am to lead your thoughts, I will lead them to the place of adoration. If you are his blessed people, be his blessing people. If he has blessed you for many a day, bless him this day.

I. I call your attention, then, first, to THE BLESSED OCCUPATION. "*Bless the Lord*, O my soul." A truly wonderful word this! How can we bless the Lord? For God to bless me I can understand and enjoy; but that it ever should be mentioned in Scripture that I can bless God is one of those incomprehensible things, which are certainly true, but are not to be explained. For man to bless God is a sort of incarnation—God in human flesh. God blessing me—that is divine: but myself blessing him, there is something of the human, but also somewhat of the divine. The divine blesses the human, or the human could not bless the divine. God is with us, or we could not be thus with God: our blessing him can only be the echo of his blessing us. The more you turn it over, the more you will wonder at it. If it had said, "Praise the Lord, O my soul," that would have been reasonable; but "Bless the Lord, O my soul," rises out of the region of reason into a still higher and more spiritual atmosphere. These are heavenly words—"Bless the Lord, O my soul."

But how can we bless God? We cannot add to his happiness, or increase his greatness, or enlarge his goodness. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not unto thee!" What can our poor drops contribute to the ocean? What can our nothingness bring to his all-sufficiency? What can our darkness contribute to his light? And yet, if the Bible says so, it must be so, for it never speaks in vain. Idle words are in the speech of man, not in the writings of Jehovah. If the Scripture teaches us to say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," then it is a correct word. We may wonder at it, but we may not dispute over it.

How, then, can we bless God?

I answer, first, God blesses us by thinking well of us, and *we bless God by thinking well of him*. When the Lord says in his heart, "This

people shall be blessed," before ever he has stretched out his hand to give anything, we are blessed by his favourable regard for us. I beg you, in the same respect, to bless God by sweet, holy, adoring, loving, grateful thoughts of him. Think well of him who thinks so graciously of you. This, surely, is no task, no burden. Such thinking is the happiest exercise of the mental powers. To think of what God has done to me—why, it makes my heart begin to beat more quickly than usual! My God! The very word is music! My Lord! How pleasant the sound! How sweet it is to speak of our Father, who is in heaven! "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" To turn over thoughts of what God is, what he has done, what he has been, how he has dealt with us, how he has revealed himself unto us, how he has glorified his holy name—why, this is a heavenly pleasure! Some of the best moments of devotion I have ever been able to enjoy I have spent in entire silence, looking up. I sat still, and wondered that God should ever love me, and I found a dew gathering about my eyes. I thought of how he loved me, and what that love had wrought in me and for me; till, not venturing to speak, I have been content to be silent before the Lord in rapture inexpressible. It was not possible for me to see him, but yet I felt that he was specially near, and I looked up to him as my Father, my Friend, my All in all. My heart felt an inward glow under a sense of divine love, and I could not have been happier if I had possessed ten thousand worlds. Oh, this is blessing God, when your heart, not venturing to use words, has learned with every pulse to beat his praise, and with every throb to mean an inward love to him. Spend some time in that quiet, rapt devotion which gets beyond the use of words into a communion of gratitude and love. Words are weak when love has to load them with her treasures; and therefore she is content to spare them the burden. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." My soul shall do what my tongue cannot. Think deeply of what the Lord has done. Do not pass his mercies over superficially, but look into them. Pry into their very heart: look into the deep things of God. Do not cease to think of the covenant of electing love, of everlasting faithfulness, of redeeming blood, of pardoning grace, and all the ways in which eternal love has shown itself since that day when you first heard it speak in your ear, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." To think well of God is one of the chief ways in which we can bless him.

We also bless God when we wish him well. You can do a great deal in this way of wishing well, and desiring great things for the Lord's honour and glory. God's wishes are all practically carried out. We cannot carry out ours; but, at the same time, we ought to indulge them freely. He that taught us to pray, bade us begin, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Our prayers are not sufficiently directed to the glory of the Lord. How seldom do we begin with praying for God's name and kingdom! We put that last which should always be first. We ought to pray far more than we do for the Lord Jesus Christ. Is it not written, "Prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised"?

Do you continually pray for Jesus, and daily praise him? Pray for yourself certainly, "Give us this day our daily bread"; but this comes after, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." Sit down and wish that all men knew God, that all men worshipped him; and let your wishes blaze up into prayers. Wish that all idols were abolished, and that Jehovah's name would be sung through every land by every tongue. Wish well for his name, his glory, his truth. Lay home to your hearts the burden of his church, and long for the success of its work. When you see his truth dishonoured, and his Word itself defamed and despised, be grieved; for this is a way of blessing *him*, when you abhor all that dishonours him. Wish well to his church, his cause, his truth, his people, and all that concerns his glory. Pray without ceasing, "Father, glorify thy Son." Turn your wishes into prayer; and, as the first stage of thinking well is a blessing of God by meditation, so this second stage of wishing well will be a blessing of God by supplication. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Think well, wish well.

Then, next, *you can bless God by speaking well of him.* Perhaps you say very little about him. Chide yourself for your reticence. Perhaps you have even spoken against him, though you are his child. I mean that you have fallen into such a state of heart that you imagine that he deals hardly with you. Ah! this is the opposite of blessing him. Perhaps you have lost your husband or child, or in health or property you are a sufferer; and it may be that the devil says to you, "Curse God and die." Surely, you will not listen to this vile suggestion. No, no. A thousand times "No." Beloved, if you be his child, far be it from you to curse your Father; and yet, in a modified sense, you may do it by inward quarrelling with the will of the Lord in his providential acts towards you. God's people provoke his Holy Spirit when they murmur against him in their hearts. A murmuring spirit is the very reverse of blessing the Lord; especially when the murmurs take a loud voice—when they are not merely choked and concealed within the bosom, but when, every time you speak, you complain bitterly of how the Lord deals with you, and think that he acts in a very hard and trying way. Away with every rebellious thought. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." "He hath not dealt with us after our sins." "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" said Jeremiah in his Lamentations. Let us lament for sin, but let us not complain because of chastisement. Indeed, some of us have nothing to complain of. We have everything for which to praise him; and if we do not do so, we deserve to be banished to the Siberia of Despair. How can we complain? If we are not in hell, everything is mercy. If you, a pardoned sinner, had to spend the rest of your days on earth in a stone cell, with no food but bread and water, performing the labour of a convict; yet, so long as you know that you are pardoned, and delivered from going down to hell, you have a thousand reasons why you should bless the Lord, and you have no single reason to complain. So long as you can say, "His mercy endureth for ever," you have enough cause for unceasing praise. But when the Lord gives you all things to enjoy; when you have food to eat, and raiment to put on; when you come up to his house

in peace, and hear the gospel, and have it sweetly applied to your own heart, why, beloved, you ought to speak well of the Lord who deals so bountifully with you. Have you said anything to praise God to-day?

"I have had nobody to speak to," says one. Do you mean to say that you have not said anything to-day to the Lord's praise? What, my dear brethren and sisters, have you been quite silent all day? You are a rare sort of people: how quiet your houses must be! You have said something, I am sure. Do you not think that God ought to have a tithe of our words, at the very least, and that somehow or other, to somebody or other, we ought to speak well of his dear name every day?

"I have nothing to say," says one. Do not say it, then; but some of us have a great deal to say, and we dare not be silent about it. The wicked speak loudly enough against God. You cannot quiet them. Why should we be silent in any company? We have as much right to speak for God as they have to speak against him. If they ever complain of singing hymns in the street, they have little cause to find fault, for they sing in the street quite enough; and some of them at very unseemly hours. If they say that we obtrude our religion, some of them obtrude their blasphemies, and assuredly we may take as much liberty as they take. We shall not be muzzled like dogs either to please the world or its master. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Speak well of his name, and let men know that thou hast a good God, who is gracious to thee in a wonderful manner.

Once more, be not satisfied with thinking well, and wishing well, and speaking well, but act well for God. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," and as he blesses thee with real gifts, with gifts unspeakably precious, *bless his name by acts and deeds of holy service and consecration.* Sometimes indulge thyself with the delight of breaking an alabaster box, very precious, and pouring its fragrance on thy Lord Jesus. Fetch out something rare and costly from thy store, and give to his cause, and bless his name. Every now and then think to thyself, I must do something fresh for Jesus. Let thy heart say—

"Oh, what shall I do my Saviour to praise?"

Invent for thyself some little thing which may give pleasure to the Well-beloved Lord, that he may not say to thee, "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices." "Bless the Lord, O my soul," and do it with hand, and purse, and substance, and sacrifice. If thou dost truly bless him, thou wilt not be content with singing hymns, such as—

"Fly abroad, thou mighty gospel,"

but thou wilt long to put a feather or two into the wing of the gospel to make it fly abroad. Thou wilt not only say, "All hail the power of Jesu's name," but thou wilt be wanting to make that name known to others. Thou wilt endeavour to spread abroad his praise by work in the Sabbath-school, or at the village-station, or on the tract-district, or at the Dorcas-meeting. Bless the Lord not in word only, but in

deed and in truth, even as he blesses thee. "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

I cannot enlarge farther. I have given you hints, bare hints, but they may show you how you may bless the Lord after the manner in which he blesses you, though the measure be far below what he doeth. As the whole heavens may be reflected in a drop of water, so may infinite love be mirrored in our affections.

II. And now, secondly, let us consider THE COMMENDABLE MANNER mentioned. Half the virtue of a thing lies in the way in which it is done. Indeed, there is usually a good deal more in the manner of an action than in the action itself. One person would relieve a poor man in such a way as to break his heart; and another will give him nothing, and yet cheer him up. You can praise a man till he loathes you, and censure him till he loves you. Now, in the service of God, it is not only what you bring, but in what spirit you bring it. The Lord loves *adverbs* as much as adjectives. *How* is as important as *What*. So here it is, "Bless the Lord, *O my soul*, and *all that is within me*, bless his holy name."

That mode of blessing God to which we are called is very spiritual—a matter of soul and spirit. I am not to bless God with my voice only, nor merely with the help of a fine organ, or a trained choir; but I am to do it after a far more difficult manner. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Soul music is the soul of music. The music of the soul is that which pleases the ear of God: the great Spirit is delighted with that which comes from our spirit. Why! you do not think that even the music of the best orchestra, majestic though it be, affords pleasure to God, in the sense in which sweet sounds are pleasing to us. As for all human melody, it must seem so imperfect to the All-glorious One, that it is no more to him than the grating of an old saw to Mozart or Beethoven. His idea of music is framed on a far higher and nobler platform of taste than ever can be reached by mortal man. The songs of cherubim and seraphim infinitely exceed all that we can ever raise, so far as mere sound is concerned; and mere sound is as nothing to God. He could set the winds to music, tune the roaring of the sea, and harmonize the crash of tempests. If he needed music, he would not ask of human lips and mouths. A heart that loves him makes music to him. A heart that praises him has within itself all the harmonies that he delights in. The sigh of love is to him a lyric, the sob of repentance is melody, the inward cries of his own children are an oratorio, and their heart-songs are true hallelujahs. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." The unheard of man is often best heard of God. Speechless praise: the heart's deep meaning—this is what he loves. Spiritual worship! Spiritual worship! Spiritual worship! And how often this is neglected! You can go to a very fine church, where there is a very grand service, and there *may be* spiritual service there; but, alas! it is more than probable that there will be no trace of it. You may go to a Quaker's room, where there are four bare whitewashed walls, and a window with a holland blind drawn down, and there *may be* spiritual worship there; and, on the other hand, there may be stolid indifference, and a formalism as fatal as the gorgeous ceremonial. It is neither the outward sumptuousness nor the plainness that will

ensure spirituality; and yet this is the life of all worship. Only the conscious presence of the Spirit of God will enable us to worship with the soul; and that is the main thing; yes, the only important thing. I do not greatly care whether a man wears a plain coat or a gown in worship. *I* shall not make a fool of *myself* by putting on a gown, I assure you; but I do not think that even if I did it would make much difference, so long as the heart was right in the sight of God. If one man feels that he can worship God best in one way, and another feels that he can worship him best in another way, it is not for his brother to judge him—let each have his own way: only let each see to it that he worships God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. This is the vital point—the heart must be in every word; the spirit must go with every note. Everything which does not arise from a devout exercise of the mental powers, and even with the full occupation of the spiritual faculties, falls short of that to which we exhort you at this time. The right note is, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." It is spiritual worship: it is worship—not from the teeth outwards, but from the heart that lies deep within the man.

When we bless God, *the sacred exercise should be intense.* "*All that is within me*, bless his holy name." We ought not to worship God in a half-hearted sort of way; as if it were now our duty to bless God, but we felt it to be a weary business, and we would get it through as quickly as we could, and have done with it; and the sooner the better. No, no; "All that is within me, bless his holy name." Come, my heart, wake up, and summon all the powers which wait upon thee! Mechanical worship is easy, but worthless. Come, rouse yourself, my brother! Rouse thyself, O my own soul! "All that is within me, bless his holy name." What we need is a universal suffrage of praise from every member of our manhood's commonwealth. Every faculty within our nature is to praise God—our memory, our hope, our fear, our desire, our imagination; all our capacities, and all our graces. There is no one part of a man's constitution, which is really a part of his manhood, which should not praise God. Ay, even the sense of humour should be sanctified to the service of the Most High! Whatever faculty God has given thee, O my soul, it has its place in the choir! Summon it to praise. If Nebuchadnezzar praised his idol god with flute, harp, sackbut, dulcimer, psaltery, and all kinds of music, mind that thou praise thy God with every faculty that thou hast within thee, so that there be no part or power of thy nature which is not used in Jehovah's praise All that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless.

What a difference there is between a man unconcerned, and a man really awakened! In your own case, I can believe you to be bright and intelligent; but your portrait—I will say nothing about it. When the photographer fits that iron rest at the back of your head, and keeps you waiting ten minutes, while he gets his plates ready, why, your soul goes out of town, and nothing remains but that heavy look! When the work of art is finished, it is you, and yet it is not you. You were driven out by the touch of that iron. Another time, perhaps, your portrait is taken instantaneously, while you are in an animated attitude, while your whole soul is there; and your friends say,

"Ay, that is your very self!" I want you to bless the Lord with your soul at home as in that last portrait. I saw a book to-day, wherein the writer says in the preface, "We have given a portrait of our mother, but there was a kind of sacred twinkle about her eyes which no photograph could reproduce." Now, it is my heart's desire that you do praise God with that sacred twinkle, with that feature or faculty which is most characteristic of you. Let your eyes praise him. Let your brow praise him. Let every part of your manhood be aroused, and so aroused as to be in fine form. I would have your soul rise to high-water mark. Give me a man on fire when God is to be praised. Let "all that is within me, bless his holy name." God is not to be half praised. A whole God, and a holy God, should have the whole of our powers engaged in blessing his holy name. Our blessing of God must be intense; so intense that all our powers, faculties, and forces are unanimous in it.

The text seems to remind me that *we ought to do this repeatedly*, because in my text the word "bless" occurs twice. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: bless his holy name." And in the next verse there is "bless the Lord" again. He is a triune God: render him triune praise. Bless him; bless him; bless him: be always blessing him. How you have looked at that dear child at times, you loving mother! You have pressed him to your bosom, and you have said, "Bless him, and bless him, and bless him again." Shall our children enjoy such affectionate repetitions, and will we not bless God, and bless him, and bless him, and bless him again? "Oh," say you, "it is a very little thing to do!" I know it is little in itself; but take care that you do not rob him of it. If your gratitude can only render a small return, this must not be a reason for withholding it. Thank him; praise him; bless him. Begin your days with blessing him. Begin your meals with blessing him. Go not to your beds without blessing him. Wake not in the morning without blessing him. Even at dead of night, if you lie sleepless, still bless him. Oh, what happy lives we should live if we were always blessing him! Let us resolve to institute a new era, and from this hour commence the age of praise.

> I will praise him in life; I will praise him in death;
> And praise him as long as he lendeth me breath.

May this be the holy resolution of every blood-bought one in this assembly! We are all needed for this work. Who among us would like to be excused so honourable a service?

Thus have I shown you the blessed occupation, and the commendable manner of it. May the Holy Spirit help us to love praise, and live praise, till we perfect praise!

III. But I ask your attention earnestly for a minute to a third point, and that is THE SACRED OBJECT of this blessing. The text is, in the original, "*Bless Jehovah*, O my soul." In the reading of the psalms, as a rule, I frequently put the word "Jehovah" before you instead of "the Lord"; for you know that wherever we get "THE LORD" in capital letters, it is Jehovah in the original; and why should we not know that the sacred name is used by the inspired writer? I am afraid that a great many so-called Christians do not

worship Jehovah at all. The god of the present period is a new god, newly sprung up. The Old Testament is looked upon by some as if it were a worn-out book, and the God of Israel is regarded as a deity of the olden time, and not the only living and true God. "Ah!" they say, "he is a very imperfect revelation"; and then they go on to reverence their own effeminate version of the Godhead. For my own part I know nothing of a new god. I adore the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God that made the heavens and the earth. I worship the God that cut Rahab, and wounded the crocodile at the Red Sea, the God that led his people through the wilderness, the God that gave them the land of Canaan for a heritage. "This God is our God for ever and ever. He shall be our guide, even unto death." "Bless Jehovah, O my soul." Let who will worship Baal or Moloch; let who will turn to the gods of Greece or Rome; my soul, bless Jehovah, and adore his sacred name! The gods of evolution and agnosticism are none of mine. These invented deities, or demons, I leave to those who dote on them. Be it mine to lead the great congregation with such a psalm as this:—

"Before Jehovah's awful throne,
Ye nations bow with sacred joy;
Know that the Lord is God alone;
He can create, and he destroy."

But the text says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, *bless his holy name*." What is meant by blessing his name? The name of God is that by which he reveals himself, so that the God we have to worship is *the Jehovah of revelation*. Here, again, we fall foul of many. They worship the god of reason, the conception of the cultured mind, the god whom they have invented for themselves by their great wisdom. The god whom men find out for themselves is not the true God. I trow that this day it is true, as in Paul's day, "The world by wisdom knew not God." "Canst thou by searching find out God?" As well mightest thou search for the springs of the sea, as expect to find out God by science. I often hear people say, "They go from nature up to nature's God." It is a very long step—too far for human strength. Stand on the highest Alp, and you will perceive that you will never step into heaven from thence. It is far easier to go from nature's God to nature, and far safer to believe in him who stoops out of the heavens, and reveals himself to you.

However, let me say to all believers—"Bless his holy name," that is, bless the God who is revealed to us, and bless him as he is revealed to us. Do not look around you after another god. Begin with the God with whom the Bible begins. Read its first word—"In the beginning God." Begin with the God with whom the New Testament begins in the gospel of John—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Keep you to revelation. There is God's name spelled out in capitals. Believe the inspired Word, for it will never mislead you. O friends, if I did not believe in the infallibility of Scripture—the absolute infallibility of it from cover to cover, I would never enter this pulpit again! If it is left to me to discriminate and to judge how much of this Book is true, and how much false, then I must myself become infallible, or

what guide have I? If my compass always points to the north, I know how to use it; but if it veers to other points of the compass, and I am to judge out of my own mind whether it is right or not, I am as well without the thing as with it. If my Bible is right always, it will lead me right; and as I believe it is so, I shall follow it, God helping me. I will not judge the Book; the Book judges me.

"This is the Judge that ends the strife,
Where wit and reason fail."

God has revealed himself in divers ways and manners through his prophets and apostles, and as such let us bless him to-night. We rejoice in him who, in the person of the Lord Jesus, and in the Scriptures of truth, has graciously unveiled his face. "Bless his holy name."

But then, notice that the psalm dwells especially upon one point. "Bless *his holy name.*" Now, a babe in grace can bless God for his goodness, but only a grown believer will bless God for his holiness. His holiness is an august attribute, an attribute which comprehends all the rest, for it means his wholeness, his perfection, his holiness. It is an attribute which looks darkly on sinful men. Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, it seems to thunder and lighten against the sinner; but as for those of us who are reconciled to God by the death of his Son, it smiles upon them. These see holiness resplendent in the great Sacrifice of Calvary, for they perceive how God would not even pardon sin so as to violate his justice, but in his infinite holiness would sooner die himself upon the cross than that his law should not be vindicated. Saints conspicuously see God's holiness? Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, we worship thee; we bless thee! Beloved, do you love a holy God? Do you bless a holy God? While you bless him for his mercy, do you equally bless him for his holiness? You bless him for his bounty, but do you feel that you could not thus bless him if you were not fully aware that he is perfectly righteous? "Bless his holy name."

Ay, when that holiness burns like fire, and threatens to devour the guilty, let us still bless his holy name! When we see his holiness consuming the great Sacrifice, we bow before the Lord in deep dread of soul, but we still bless his holy name. An unholy God! It were absurd to think of such a being; but a Thrice-holy God—let us bless and praise him. When men or women can say, "We love, and bless, and praise a holy God," there is something of holiness in them. God, the Holy Spirit, has begun to make you holy; since to appreciate holiness you must yourself be holy. No man can see the beauty of holiness until his eyes have been washed in the river of the water of life; and if God has made you pure, so that you can praise his holiness, he has given you to be a partaker of his holiness.

So I have put before you in a few words the truth that the one blessed object of your praise is—the God of Abraham, the God of the Old and New Testaments, who has revealed his name, the God of perfect holiness. "Bless Jehovah, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

IV. I have done when I add this fourth point. Let us remember

THE SUITABLE MONITOR. In the text *a suitable monitor* appears. A Christian man who wants somebody to look after him is a very imperfect Christian man; for he who has the love of God in his soul will look after himself. Who is it that says to David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul"? Why, *it is David talking to David.* The man speaks to himself. Beloved, may my voice be useful to you at this time; but the proof of it will be that henceforth your own voice will suffice, and you will often give yourself the exhortation—"Bless the Lord, O my soul."

Some of you go out preaching, or you teach a class in a Sunday-school. Keep on with that; but do not forget to look after one pupil of yours who needs your care very greatly. I mean, look to *yourself;* and every now and then say, "My soul, bless the Lord." What are you at? You have been grumbling of late. Wake up, and say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." You have been dull and cold-hearted of late. Chide yourself, for this will not do.

If you have this monitor, you will have *one that is always at home.* You will not have to send across the road for a minister. Here is a spiritual chaplain who will be resident with you, and always ready with his personal advice. Will you not try to practise your ministry upon yourself, and begin at once to apply to yourself all that you would say to another whom you would excite to bless the Lord?

Ought you not to do it? Are you not *afraid of growing cold* in this holy service? "No," say you, "I am not." Then I am afraid that you are cold already. "No," say you, "I am full of life." Will you always be so? Man's security is the devil's opportunity. Whenever you say to yourself, "All is well with me," I fear for you. A foul fiend is watching for your halting, and he laughs as he sees how you delude yourself. You are not all you think you are. Bestir yourself, and praise the Lord.

Practise this praising of God when you are *stimulated by the example of others.* If you hear others praising God, say to yourself, "Bless the Lord, O *my* soul." Do not let any man praise God more than you do. When you see your brethren aglow with praising God, do not grovel in the dust, and moan, "Our souls can neither fly, nor go, to reach eternal joys"; but stretch your wing, and rise to hallelujahs. Rest not till a gracious example has stimulated you.

But if you happen to be where there is nobody to stimulate you, and where everybody goes the other way, then *praise God alone.* Say to yourself, "Bless the Lord, O MY soul. I dwell amongst lions. But none the less for their roaring, bless the Lord, O my soul." That will stop the lions' mouths. What if you are in prison, like Paul and Silas; bless the Lord. Nothing shakes prison-walls, and breaks jailers' hearts, like the praises of the Lord. Here I am where everybody doubts the holy God. Bless the Lord, O my soul; and be all the firmer, and all the bolder. If everybody sneers at divine truth, bless the Lord, O my soul. Let all men know that there is one in the world who does not sneer at revelation. Let opposition be like a strong blast to make the furnace seven times hotter. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." What have I to do with whether other people bless God or not? I must praise him all the more if others are dumb before him. This, dear friends, is how it ought to be from me personally.

If I do not praise the Lord, the stone in the wall will cry out against me; and it will complain of you also if you be silent. You owe him more than many. If all forget, yet do you remember.

This is pleasant as well as profitable. Praise is not medicine, it is meat and drink. It is salutary, and it is also sweet. Is any other occupation comparable to blessing the Lord? Is there anything that you can do which surpasses the spending of your life in magnifying the Lord? If you practise it, it will be profitable to you. It will make you grow in grace; it will make your burden light; it will make your way to heaven seem short; it will make you fearlessly face the world. If you have God within your heart, and you are blessing his name, you will not mind your outward circumstances. Whether God gives or takes, you will continue to bless him. This will be useful to you in saving others. A praiseful heart is a soul-winning heart. If we bless God more, we shall bless our neighbours more. A happy Christian attracts others by his joy.

Lastly, *to bless God will prepare us for heaven.* Praise is the rehearsal of our eternal song. By grace we learn to sing, and in glory we continue to sing. What will some of you do when you get to heaven, if you go on grumbling all the way? Do not hope to get to heaven in that style. But now begin to bless the name of the Lord.

I have not spoken thus to all of you. Some of you cannot bless the Lord as yet. Will you try? Think how sad it is to be in a state of mind in which you cannot render acceptable praise. You must be born again before you can bless the Lord. May the Lord convince you of the necessity that he should bless you before you can bless him! May you receive his blessing in a moment by faith in the Lord Jesus! The Lord grant it, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm ciii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—174, 146 (First Version).

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

BELOVED READERS,—My New Year's wish for you is this: *May the Lord bless you, and may you bless the Lord!* To this end may the sermons ever be helpful! Beginning the Thirty-sixth Volume, I feel grateful and hopeful. For the past and the future I would bless the Lord: for the one received by experience; for the other grasped by faith. May 1890 be the best year we have ever lived!

Yours, for Christ's sake,

Mentone, Dec. 27, 1889. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A STRAIGHT TALK.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 12TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, May 19, 1889.

"I cannot come."—Luke xiv. 20.

THERE are different ways of replying to the invitation of the gospel when you mean to refuse it. They are all, at bottom, bad, and they may all be classed under one head; for "they all with one consent began to make excuse"; but yet some are more decently worded than others, and have a greater show of reason about them. The first two sets of people, who were invited to the supper, said to the servant, apologetically, with some appearance of courtesy, "I pray thee have me excused." But the third man did not beat about the bush at all, or pray to be excused; but he said tersely, bluntly, sharply, "*I cannot come.*" This was a final reply; he did not intend, nor wish, to come to the supper. "*I cannot come,*" was a snappish word; but as he had married a wife, he thought the idea of his coming was utterly unreasonable, and he needed no sort of excuse.

Now, what did that mean? Well, it meant that he thought very lightly of the giver of the feast. He had no respect for this "certain man," who had made a great supper. He had an opportunity of slighting him by refusing his invitation, and he did so outspokenly, saying, "*I cannot come.*"

It also showed that he had a very low opinion of the supper itself. It might be a respectable meal, but he did not want it: he could have quite as good a supper at home. He was better off than those people in the streets. Those hedge-birds might be glad enough of a supper for nothing; but he was not dependent upon anybody, and he could do very well for himself. Do you not know many in this world who have no opinion of Christ, no love to God? Religion is to them mere nonsense—an unpractical, dreamy matter, about which they have no time to concern themselves. It is a pitiful thing that the God, whom angels worship, they will not even think of; and the Christ who is the loveliest of the lovely—in him they see no beauty; and the priceless provisions of mercy, the pardon of sin, the salvation of the soul, the

heaven of God—they neglect these things, as if they did not need them, or could get them whenever they please. Thousands are proudly independent of the free grace of God; they are good enough, and virtuous enough; and need not cry for mercy, like the wicked and profane. In their own judgment, they are quite able to fight their own way to heaven. They want not the charities of the gospel. Contempt of the great Feast-maker, and contempt of the feast itself—these two pieces of proud disdain induce a man to say, "*I cannot come.*"

But there was more than common pride in this brief, brusque speech, for this man had, at the first, made a promise to come. He had been bidden, and it is implied in the parable that he had at that time accepted the invitation. He had accepted the cards of invitation to the supper; and, though he had done so, he now flies in the face of his own self, and says, "I cannot come." I think that I am addressing some here who have pledged themselves many a time to come to Christ. If I remember rightly, you asked the prayers of friends, and promised that you would be in real earnest. You looked your wife in the face, and said, "I hope that it will not be long before I am with you in the church of God, and shall no longer have to go away and leave you alone at the Lord's table." You asked some of your Christian friends to make a point of praying for you; but you have never carried out your intention of becoming a true Christian. Your resolutions may be still read in God's eternal book of record; but they are there as witnesses to your falseness and changeableness. The counterfoils are there; but there is no fulfilment of any of the resolutions. God remembers them, although you have forgotten to carry them out. You accepted the invitation on the spur of the moment; but when worldliness had got the upper hand with you, you went back to your own obstinacy, and said, "I cannot come." Perhaps you have not said it in quite as sharp a tone as I used just now; but it has come to the same thing, for you have not come to the Gospel Supper. It matters little whether you say it angrily or quietly; for if you do not come, the practical result is the same. I think I hear some of you, even now, say, "Do not ask me so often. I cannot come. It is of no use to worry me about it. I do not wish to be uncivil or unkind. Though I said I would come, I retract my words: I cannot come."

In saying, "I cannot come," the man intended, as it were, to dismiss the matter. He wished to be understood as having made up his mind, and he was no longer open to argument. He did not parley; he did not talk; but he just said, off-hand, "I want no more persuading; I cannot come, and that settles it." Certain of our hearers have come to such a condition of heart that they would gladly silence our gospel expostulations: with a kindly but determined tone they would say, "*I cannot come.* Do not trouble me any more."

I suppose that this man, after he had made that positive declaration, felt that there was truth in what he had stated. He said, "*Therefore* I cannot come." He had reason to support him in what he said, and he went home, sat down, and enjoyed himself, and felt that he was a righteous man, quite as good as those who had gone to the supper, and perhaps rather better. He could not blame himself,

for when a man cannot do it, why, of course, he cannot do it; and why should he be censured for an impossibility? "I cannot come": how can I help that? So he sat down with a cool indifference to eat his own supper. It was nothing to him whether the great giver of the feast was grieved or not; whether his oxen and fatlings were wasted or not. He had said it to his conscience very often, till he half believed it—"I cannot come, and there is no disputing it." I have no doubt that many, who have never come to Christ, have made themselves content to be without him by the belief that they cannot come. Although the impossibility, if it did exist, would involve the greatest of all calamities, yet they speak of it with very little concern. Practically, they say, "I cannot be saved. I must remain an unbeliever." What an awful thing for any mortal to say! Yet you have said it till you almost believe it; and you wish us now to leave you quite alone for this dreadful reason. You do not want to be troubled to-night. The text already begins to startle you a little, and you do not like it. You are almost sorry that you are here. If the Lord helps me, I will trouble you far more before you get out of this place: I have heavy tidings from the Lord for you. I shall endeavour, if I can, to pull away those downy pillows from your sleepy head, and wake you up to immediate anxiety, lest you perish in your sins. With kindly importunity I would plead with you and try to show you that this little speech of yours, "*I cannot come*," is a wretched speech. You must throw it to the winds, and prove that you can come by coming at once, and receiving of the great feast of love, and honouring him that spreads it for hungry souls.

Two or three things I would like to say about this case, for *it is very serious*. It was bad enough for this man to say, "I cannot come," but it is far worse for you to say, "I cannot come to Christ." Remember, if the invited guests did not come, and come at once, they could never come, for there was only that one supper, and not a series of banquets. The great man who made the feast did not intend to prepare another. A very grave offence would be committed by their not coming to the one supper. My dear hearers, there is only one time of grace for you, and if that be ended, you will not have a second opportunity. There is only one Christ Jesus; there is no more sacrifice for sin. There is only one way of eternal love and mercy; do not forsake it. I pray you, do not turn away from the one door of life, the one way of salvation. If it is slighted now, and the feast is over, as it will be when you die, then you have lost the great privilege, and you have been guilty of a gross neglect, from the consequences of which you never will be able to escape. Note this, and beware.

Besides, it is not merely a supper that you will lose when you say, "I cannot come." To lose a supper would be little, and might soon be set right when breakfast-time came round. But you lose eternal life, and that lost in time can never be found in eternity. You lose the pardon of sin, reconciliation to God, adoption into the family of love—these are heavy losses. You lose the joy of faith for life, and you lose comfort in death—who can estimate this damage? Lose not your immortal soul! Oh, lose not *that!* For if you gain

the whole world, it will not recompense you for such a loss. Lose what you will, but lose not your soul, I pray you! Seek that salvation without which it had been better for you that you had never been born.

Besides, once more, if you do not come to Christ, it will imply the greatest insult that you can put upon your Maker. You have already grieved him by breaking his laws; but what will be his indignation when you refuse his mercy? when you turn your back on his Son? when you refuse not only your God, but your crucified Saviour, hanging there with outstretched arms, bleeding his life away, that he may save you? Do not turn your back on your own redemption. No blood was ever sprinkled on the threshold of an Israelite's house; for he must not trample on it: that would be ruinous indeed. The blood was on the lintel and on the two side-posts, but never under foot. Trample not upon the blood of Christ; but you will do so if you refuse his great salvation. If you will not come to him to be saved, you have as good as said that you will be damned rather than be loved by God—that you will be damned rather than be saved through Jesus Christ his Son. It will prove a costly insult to you, as well as a grievous affront to your Lord.

Having said so much by way of preface, I am now going to take these words, "*I cannot come*," and handle them a little with the hope that you may grow ashamed of them.

I. First, this man declared, "I cannot come," because he said, "I HAVE MARRIED A WIFE." He had promised to come to the supper, and he was bound to fulfil his promise. Why did he want to get married just then? Surely, he had not been compelled to marry all in a hurry, so that he could not keep engagements already made. He was bound to keep his promise to the maker of the feast; and that promise was claimed of him by the messenger. He could not say that his wife would not let him come. Such a declaration might be true in England; but in the East the men are always masters of the situation, and women seldom bear rule in the family. No Oriental would say that his wife would not let him come. Nor in these Western regions, where the woman more nearly gains her rights, can any man truthfully say that his wife will not allow him to be a Christian. I do not believe that any of you will be able to say, when you come to die, that your wife was responsible for your not being a Christian. Most men would be angry if we told them that they were hen-pecked, and could not call their souls their own. He must be a fool, indeed, who would let a woman lead him down to hell against his will. The fact is, a man is a mean creature when he tries to throw the blame of his sin upon his wife. I know that Father Adam set us a bad example in that respect; but the fact that this was a part of the sin which caused the ruin of our race should act as a beacon to us. You certainly, as a man, ought not to demean yourself so much as to say, "I cannot come, for my wife will not let me." If one of you, however, continues to whine "My wife is my ruin. I am unable to be a Christian because of my wife," I must ask you a question or two before I believe your pitiable story. Do you let her rule you in everything else? Does she keep you at home of an evening? Does she pick all your companions for you?

Why, my dear man, if I am not much mistaken, you are a self-willed, cross-grained, pig-headed animal about everything else; and then, when it comes to the matter of religion, you turn round, and whine about being governed by your wife! I have no patience with you. It is more than probable that the very best thing that could happen to you would be to have your wife on the throne for the next few years. Upon such a solemn matter as this do not talk nonsense. You know that the blame lies with yourself alone: if you wished to seek the best things, the little woman at home would be no hindrance to you.

This man said, "*I cannot come.*" Why? Because he had a wife! Strange plea! for surely that was a reason why he should come, and bring her with him. If any man, unhappily, has a wife opposed to the things of God, instead of saying, "I cannot be a Christian, for I have an unconverted wife," he should seek for double grace that he may win his wife to Christ. If a woman laments that she has an unconverted husband, let her live the nearer to God that she may save her husband. If a servant has an unconverted master, let him labour with double diligence to glorify God, that he may win his master. Thus you see there are two reasons why you should come to the gospel banquet; not only for your own sake, but for the sake of your unconverted relatives. My neighbour's candle is blown out; and is that a reason why I must not light mine? No, but that is a reason why I should be all the more careful to keep mine burning, that I may light my neighbour's candle too. It is a pity that my wife should be lost, but I cannot help her by being lost myself. Nay; but I may help her if I take my stand, and follow Christ the more resolutely because my wife opposes me. Good man, do not allow your wife to draw you aside! Good woman, do not let your husband hinder you! Do not say, "I cannot attend the house of God, nor be a Christian while I have such a husband as I have." Nay, that is the reason why you should take your stand the more bravely in the name of God that, by your example, those whom you love may be rescued from destruction. How knowest thou, O wife, but that thou mayest save thy unbelieving husband? How knowest, thou, O servant, but that thou mayest save thy unbelieving master? I remember hearing Mr. Jay tell a story about a Nonconformist servant-girl, who went to live in a family of worldly people who attended the Church of England, although they were not real believers. They were outside buttresses of the church, and they had very little to do with the inside of it; and outsiders are generally the most bigoted. They were very angry with their servant for going to the little meeting-house, and threatened to discharge her if she went again. But she went all the same, and very kindly but firmly assured them that she must continue to do so. At last she received notice to go: they could not, as good Church-people, have a Dissenter living with them. She took their rough dismission very patiently; and it came to pass that, the day before she was to leave her situation, a conversation took place somewhat of this sort. The master said, "It is a pity, after all, that Jane should go. We never had such a good girl. She is very industrious, truthful, and attentive." The wife said, "Well, I have thought that it is hardly the thing to send her away for going to her chapel. You always speak

up for religious liberty, and it does not look quite like religious liberty to turn our girl away for worshipping God according to her conscience. I am sure she is a deal more careful about her religion than we are about ours." So they talked it over, and they said, "She has never answered us pertly, nor found fault with us about our going to church. Her religion is a greater comfort to her than ours is to us. We had better let her stay with us, and go where she likes." "Yes," said the husband, "and I think we had better go and hear the minister that she goes to hear. Evidently she has got something that we have not got. Instead of sending her away for going to chapel, we will go with her next Sunday, and judge the matter for ourselves." And they did, and the master and mistress were not long before they were members of that same church. Do not say, therefore, "I cannot come, because my master and mistress object to it." Do not make idle excuses out of painful facts which are reasons why you should be more determined than ever, even if you have to go to heaven alone, that you will be a follower of Christ. Keep to your resolve, and you may entertain the hope and belief that you will lead others to the Saviour's feet.

II. A second reason is even more common. It is not everybody who can say, "I have married a wife"; but everywhere you can meet with a person who pleads, "I HAVE NO TIME." You say, "Sir, I cannot attend to religion, for I have no time." I remember hearing an old lady say to a man who said that he had no time, "Well, you have got all the time there is." I thought that it was a very conclusive answer. You have had the time, and you still have all the time there is—why do you not use it? Nobody has more than twenty-four hours in a day, and you have no less. You have no time? That is very singular! What have you done with it; you certainly have had it? Time flies with you, I know, but so it does with me, and with everybody. What do you do with it? "Oh, I have no time," says one. I say again, you have had the time, and that time was due, in part, to a solemn consideration of the things of God. You have robbed God of that part of time which was due to him, and you have given up to some inferior thing what your great Lord and Master could rightly claim for the highest purposes.

You have time enough for common things. See here, I never meet any of you, in the middle of the day, in the street in your shirt-sleeves. I do not find you going up and down Cheapside half-dressed. "Oh, no, of course, we have time to put on our clothes." You have time to dress your bodies, and no time to dress your souls with the robe of Christ's righteousness? Do not tell me that! I do not meet any one of our friends saying, towards evening, "I am ready to faint, for I have had nothing to eat since I got up. I have had no time to get a morsel of meat." No, no, they have had their breakfast, and they have had their dinner, and so on. "Oh, yes, we have time to eat," says one. Do you tell me that you have time to feed your bodies, and that God has not given you time in which to feed your souls. Why, it is not common-sense! Such statements will not hold water for a moment. You must have time to feed your souls in, if you have time to feed your bodies in. People find time to look in the glass, and wash their faces, and brush their hair. Have you no time whatever to look at

yourself, to see your spiritual spots, and to wash in the fountain that is open for sin and for uncleanness? O dear sirs, you have time for common things, and you must certainly have time for those much more serious and important matters which concern your souls and immortality!

You have no time? How is this, when you waste a good deal? How much do many of us spend in silly talk? How much time do certain persons spend in frivolous amusements? I have heard people say that they have no time, when I am sure I do not know what they can have to occupy them. Are there not many people about who, if they were tied in a knot, and thrown into the Bay of Biscay, would be missed by nobody; for they do no good to any mortal being? They are living without an object—purposeless, aimless lives; and yet they talk about not having time! Such pretences will not do. When you plead with God, say something that looks like common-sense.

You have no time, and yet you undertake more secular work. You keep a shop, do you not? "Yes, I have a large shop." You are going to enlarge it, are you not? Will you have time, do you think, to attend to it when the business grows? "Oh, yes, I dare say that I shall find time: at any rate, I must make time, somehow or other." You are going to take a second shop, are you not? How will you manage it? "Oh, I shall find time." Yes, my dear sirs, you can find time for all those enlargements, and speculations, and engagements; let me be plain with you, and say that you could find time for thought about your soul if you had a mind to do so. To plead that you have no time for religion is a fraud. It will not do! It is lying unto God to say that you have no time. When a man wants to do a thing, if he has no time, he makes time. I beg the idle man not to go on to deceive himself with the notion that he has no time. "Where there's a will there's a way." Where there is a heart to religion there is plenty of time for it. Blame your unwilling minds, and not your scanty hours. You will have time enough when your hearts are once turned in the right direction.

Besides, time is not the great matter. Did the Lord demand of you a month's retirement from business? Did we command you to spend two days in a week in prayer? Did we tell you that you could not be saved unless you shut yourself up an hour every morning for meditation? I would to God you could have an hour for meditation! but, if you cannot, who has demanded it of you? The command is that you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and forsake your sin; and this is a matter which will not interfere with your daily work. A man can turn the potter's wheel, and pray. A man can lay bricks, and pray. A man can drive the plane, and pray. A man can walk behind a plough, and yet he can be walking with God. A woman can scrub a floor, and commune with God. A man can be riding on horseback, and yet he can still be in communion with the Most High. A woman can be making the beds, and growing in grace. It is not a matter in which time comes in so much as to interfere with any of the ordinary duties of life. Therefore throw away that excuse, and do not say any longer, "I cannot come because I have no time." At once repent of sin, and believe in the Lord Jesus; and then all

your time will be free for the service of the Lord, and yet you will have not a moment the less for the needful duties of your calling.

III. There is a third form of this excuse, and a very common one: "I HAVE MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO." Now, come! I will have you by the throat over that. I shall contradict you flatly. *You have nothing more important to do.* That would be utterly impossible. Nothing under heaven can be of one-hundredth part of the importance of your being reconciled to God, and saved through Jesus Christ. What is that more important business? To make money? Where is the importance of that? You may get a pile of it, and the net result will be greater care, and the more to leave when you die. But you tell me you must have an opportunity for study. Well, that is better; but what are you going to study? Science? Art? Politics? Are these important as compared with the saving of your soul? Why, if you have an educated mind, and it is lost, it will be as bad to lose it in culture and learning as to lose it in ignorance. Your first duty is to be right with your God, who made you. Put nothing before your God. Has Christ redeemed you? Rest not till you know the truth of that redemption by being reconciled to God through the death of his Son. Nothing can be so important to a man as to be obedient to his Maker, and enjoy his Maker's love. Nothing, therefore, can be so important to a man as to be pardoned through the Saviour, and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit from an enemy of God into a friend of God.

"Oh!" say you, "but my business occupies so much of my time." Yes; but do you not know that very likely your business would go on better if you were right with God? Many a time a business goes wrong because the man is wrong; and sometimes it is even incumbent upon God to be at cross-purposes with a man because a man is at cross-purposes with him. If you walk frowardly towards him, he will walk frowardly towards you; but when you are obedient to him, he can make other things subservient to you. In a little church on the Italian mountains I saw, amongst many absurd daubings, one picture which struck me. There was a ploughman who had turned aside at a certain hour to pray. The rustic artist drew him upon his knees before the opened heavens; and, lest there should be any waste of time occasioned by his devotion, an angel was going on with the ploughing for him. I like the idea. I do not think an angel ever did go on with a man's ploughing while he was praying, but I think that the same result often comes to pass, and that when we give our hearts to God, and seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things are added unto us. If religion does not make you richer, which it may not do, it will make you more contented with what you have. The blessing of God, with a dinner of herbs, will make it better than a stalled ox without that benediction. He that would make the best of this world, and have the greatest enjoyment here of the truest and best kind, will do well to give his first attention to his Saviour, and his whole heart to faith in him, and diligence in his service. You have no more important business, I am quite sure, than the business which concerns God and eternity.

IV. I have heard some use the excuse "I CANNOT AFFORD TO BE A CHRISTIAN." Well, my friend, let us have a talk about *that*. Cost you more than you can afford? What do you mean? What cost? Cost you money? It need not. It will cost you no more than you like to spend upon it with a glad heart. God will give you a generous spirit, which will make you love to support his cause, and to help the poor, and contribute your share to all Christian mission work. But in the kingdom of Christ there is no taxation. Giving becomes a gratification, liberality a luxury. Nothing will be dragged from you by force. Surely, our God abhors money that comes into his exchequer by anything but the freewill offerings of loving hearts. It will not cost you much in that way, I am sure, for you are only to give as God has prospered you.

Suppose man should say, "Well, I must take a seat in the chapel if I would comfortably hear the gospel." Very well. Will it be unjust that you bear your proportion of necessary expenses in supporting the man who gives all his time, thought, and ability to you? Will you pay as much in a year to hear the gospel as many pay for one night at the play? Ay, and do not many at a horse-race spend a hundred times more than they ever gave throughout their whole existence either to the poor or to the church of God? What you will save by holy, gracious, thrifty habits, will render this no loss to you, but a gain.

"Oh, but I meant that I could not afford it, for I should have to lose several friends." Is that friend worth keeping who is an enemy to God? The woman who would lead you away from God, or the man who would keep you out of heaven—are friends of that sort worth having? Be brave, and end a connection which will otherwise endlessly connect you with the bottomless pit.

"Oh," says one, "but I mean that I should lose so much in trade." Ah, well! I will not ask you to explain what you mean by that; for there is an ugly look about that statement. You know more about your trade than I do. No doubt there are trades which pander to the vices of men, and become all the more profitable in proportion to the growth of drunkenness and impurity. These must be given up. Moreover, there are traders who live by puffery, and lying, and cheating; and I do not recommend you to profess to be a Christian if that is your line of things. It is better to give up all profession of religion when you go in for unrighteous gain. What? Did I hear a hint about adulteration? Did I also hear that you do not give full weight and true measure? Ah, my dear fellow! give up that game at once, whether you become a Christian or not; but certainly, if that is what you mean, the loss of dishonest profits will be a great gain to you, both for this life and the next.

"Well," says one, "I should have to give up a good many pleasures." Pleasures which block the road to heaven ought to be given up at once. You may think me a very melancholy sort of person; but I fancy that I am about as happy as any man in England. I appreciate a merry thought and a cheerful speech as much as anybody. I can laugh, and I can enjoy good, clean, humorous remarks as well as most people; and, having now served the Lord for nearly forty

years, I bear my witness that I have never had to relinquish a single pleasure for which I have felt a deliberate desire. As soon as you are renewed in heart, you are changed in your pleasures; and that which might have been a pleasure once to you would then be a misery. If I had to sit in some people's company, and hear what some people talk about, it would be hell to me. One night, having to preach up in the North of England, this unfortunate circumstance occurred to me. When I got down to the railway, I was put into a first-class carriage with five racing gentlemen, who were going to Doncaster races. Happily they did not know me, but from the beginning to the end the conversation of these gentlemen was garnished with expressions which tortured me, and at last they fell upon a subject which was unutterably loathsome. I pray God that I may not be condemned to dwell with such people for ever, for it would be hell to me. Ladies and gentlemen, you need not think that I rob myself of any pleasure when I do not go to race-courses, or associate with the licentious. It is my pleasure to keep far off from the pleasures of those men of pleasure, in whose company I was forced to spend that evening. The pleasures of this world are so full of dust, dirt, and grit, that he who has once washed his mouth clean of them, declines another meal of such draff. You will lose no pleasure if you come to Christ.

V. I hear one other person say, "I cannot come." Why not? "Well, sir, I do not mean that I shall not come one of these days; but IT WOULD NOT BE CONVENIENT JUST NOW. I could not yield my heart to the Lord to-night." No. I know. You have an engagement to-morrow which must be attended to, but it would not be quite the thing for a Christian. Just so. It would not be convenient to-night, nor on Monday, nor will it be on Tuesday, depend upon it. Your anxious thoughts will have gone by then. It will not be convenient to be saved! You want to see a little "life," do you not? "Life" in London means death. "Oh, but just now I am only an apprentice!" Then at once be bound apprentice to Christ. "But I am a journeyman. When I get a little business of my own, then will be the time." Will it? Oh, that you would become a journeyman to Christ! "But I have associations just now that render it difficult." That is to say, God must wait your convenience. Is that the way the poor treat the doctors who receive patients gratis? Do they say, "Doctor, it is not convenient for me to call upon you before ten or eleven o'clock in the morning. It is not convenient for me to come to your house. I shall be glad to see you if you come to my house about half-past eleven in the evening." Would you send a message to a physician in the West End, that you will be pleased for him to attend to you for nothing if he will come at your time? "Oh," say you, "I should not think of insulting a doctor like that, if he is kind enough to attend to me for nothing." And yet you will insult your God! You mean that God is not worthy of your strength and health; but when you are old, and worn out, then you mean to sneak into heaven, and cheat the devil. It is dirt mean of you! I can say no better. Though the Lord is exceedingly gracious and merciful, yet, when men make up their minds to it that they will only give him

the fag-end of life, it is small wonder that they die in their sins. What must God think of such treatment? Do not say, "I cannot come." Come at once. The Lord help you to come!

VI. I have heard people say, "I cannot come, sir, for I CANNOT UNDERSTAND IT. I am a poor man, I never had any education." What is it that you cannot understand? Can you not understand that you have broken God's law, and that the just God must punish you for it? You can understand that. Can you not understand that, if you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is certain that he took your sin, and bore it in his own body on the tree, and put your sin away, for his name is the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"? Can you not understand that, if you trust in him, you have him to stand in your room, and place, and stead; for the Scripture says, "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." You *can* understand it, if you wish to do so. There is nothing in the gospel which the poorest and the least educated cannot understand if their minds be made willing to know and receive the truth. If the Spirit of God will come upon them, they can not only understand the gospel, but grasp it, and enjoy it, and begin to teach it to others, too; for the Lord makes the babes to have knowledge and discretion in his ways, while the wise and learned in scientific matters often miss the way to the eternal kingdom.

I have done. The sound of the bell tells me that my time has fled. Another bell will one day warn *you* that you have done, and that your life is over, even as my sermon is over. But I wanted just to say this. If there is any man here who says, "I cannot come," I beg him to express himself properly, and speak out the sad fact as it ought to be spoken. Here is the style: "Unhappy wretch, I cannot come to Christ! Millions in heaven have come, but I cannot come. My mother died in a good hope; but, 'Mother, I cannot come.' My father has gone home to be with Jesus; but I cannot come." I thank God that this statement is not true; but if you say it, and believe it, you ought never to rest any more; for if you cannot come to Christ, you are the unhappiest person in the world. Is there any woman that cries, "I cannot come," or any man that pleads, "I cannot come"? Wherever you are sitting or standing, let the bell that told out the death of the last hour, warn you of your spiritual death; for if you cannot come to Christ, and eat of his supper, you cannot be saved. You cannot escape from the wrath to come: you are doomed for ever.

May I ask you to do another thing? If you still intend to say, "I cannot come," will you speak the truth now? Will you alter a word, and get nearer the truth? Say, "I will not come." "I cannot come," is Greek, or double Dutch; but the plain English is, "I WILL NOT COME." I wish you would say *that* rather than the other, because the recoil of saying, "I will not come: I will not believe in Jesus: I will not repent of sin: I will not turn from my wicked ways"—the recoil, I say, from that might be blessed by God to you to make you see your desperate state. I wish you would then cry, "I cannot sit down, and make my own damnation sure by saying that I will not come to Christ."

Will you now, instead of refusing to come, resolve to come at once? Say, "I will come to Jesus. Tell me how." You can only come to Christ by trusting him. Trust yourself with him, and he will save you. Never did anyone trust Jesus in vain. Trust has a powerful influence over the Lord Jesus. He comes to the rescue of a soul that leans wholly upon him. He will do all things for you: he will change your nature as well as forgive your sin; and your nature being changed, you shall lead a new life from this time forth, and grow in grace until you become like him in whom you trust; and then he will take you to be for ever with him. Washed in the blood of the Lamb, you shall walk with him in white amidst the glorified.

Thus I have talked to-night in a very homely way. I pray the Lord to bless words which are intended to be faithful, plain, and impressive. May we meet in heaven! There are very many strangers here to-night; may you not be strangers to the Lord Jesus! Many of our friends are away, and some of you have come out although it is a nasty wet evening: I take this as a token for good. God bless you! I pray that you may get the double blessing, and may remember this gloomy, dark, Decembery evening in May by the blessing that God shall put upon you through Jesus Christ his Son. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke xiv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—504, 560, 550.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—I hope this sermon may touch the consciences of the careless. It should be widely scattered if such is found to be the case. I have earnestly sought that it may be so by the power of the Holy Spirit. Please unite with me in this.

I do not find myself quite recovered. We have wet weather, and my old enemy tries me. I hope to shake it all off soon, and to return to work in good condition; but this may need a little longer delay. If this rest sets me going for all the remainder of this year, it will be a very good investment. Remembering my readers in my prayers,

I am, your servant for Christ's sake,

Mentone, Jan. 3, 1890. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WITNESSES AGAINST YOU.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 19TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I set a great assembly against them."—Nehemiah v. 7.

THE facts are these. At the time when certain of the Jews returned with Nehemiah to Jerusalem, many of them were in very straitened circumstances; and, contrary to the Jewish law, the richer Jews lent them money upon usurious interest, amounting to the hundredth per month, or twelve per cent. per annum. They took from their poorer brethren their lands, or put a heavy mortgage upon them; and in some cases took the men themselves to be slaves for debts which they had unavoidably incurred. Now, as you know, every Jew was a land-holder, and his land, if mortgaged for a time, must return free to him in the fiftieth year; and, though a Jew might for a while become a servant to his Jewish brother, yet he must go out free at the end of the seventh year. He could only be bound for a short period of servitude. Nehemiah called to him, therefore, the elders, and nobles, and rulers of Jerusalem, and showed them how wrong they were to hold their poorer brethren in bondage. "Ye exact usury, every one of his brother," he says; and he rebukes them sharply for it. When he found that his own words were scarcely powerful enough with them, he gathered together the people, and let them all have a voice, and in the many voices there was power. "I set," said he, "a great assembly against them." Some persons are deaf to the voice of justice until it is repeated loudly by thousands of their fellow-men. The silent voice of principle and right they will not hear, and the gentle rebuke of some one faithful friend they will despise; but when righteousness enlists public opinion on its side, when many are seen to be its advocates, then these very persons will show that they have relics of conscience left, and they yield to right demands, because they see them not only to be just, but to be popular. This is the main point with those of the feebler sort; and we turn the scale, if, like Nehemiah, we "set a great assembly against them."

Now, it struck me to-night that I could most properly, without any

difficulty whatever, set a great assembly against every unconverted person here; and, in addition to calling upon him in the name of God, and by the claims of truth, to consider his ways and turn to God, I might summon a great assembly who should testify against the evil course which the unconverted are pursuing.

I shall try to act upon this plan to-night, in reference *to those who remain unconverted.* I would set a great assembly against you. You have not repented of your sins; you have not accepted the salvation which is provided in Christ Jesus; you live without prayer; you seek your own, instead of seeking God.

I set against you the great assembly of all the godly that are upon the earth. They all testify against you. They look upon you with love and anxiety, and desire to see you converted; but, while you are as you are, they are against you. Does not *the consistent life* of every true Christian rebuke you? When you see humble persons devout, gracious, though nothing be said, and though they be not eloquent in speech, is not their life eloquent? Do you not feel it? Have you never felt, even in your most careless moods, that it would be better for you if you were as they are? And when you have seen them remain true and upright under temptation, have you not said within yourself, "After all, there is something in them which I admire, and I wish that I possessed the same strong principles to keep me right in the hour of trial"? Every man, after all, in the bottom of his soul, feels the power of godliness: he cannot help it. In the assembly of the righteous God is greatly feared. The wicked know God's presence among his people, and they do fear it, whether they confess it or not. In fact, slander, ridicule, and persecution are a form of homage which rebellion pays to obedience, which sin pays at the footstool of righteousness. The evil hate the good, because it condemns their evil; they try to make themselves despise it because it makes them despise themselves.

The righteous do not only stand against you in the consistency of their character, but *their joy in God* rebukes you. If you happen to be an unconverted man, and to have had a godly mother, the subject of much weakness and pain, you cannot have forgotten the sacred cheerfulness with which she bore her life-long affliction. Or, if you have lost a Christian wife, who enjoyed but little comfort in her life with you, you cannot but remember that pale yet happy face when it bade you adieu, and entered into its rest. You know there was a calm about that woman in the time of trouble which you could not imitate; that she took patiently pain which would have startled you into madness, for the power of grace was in her, and made her strong. She, and such as she was, children of God, made calm, and peaceful, and happy—I set them in an assembly against you, and they bear witness against you, because you obey not the living God.

Moreover, they do not only bear witness, but *their very horror at your sin* and at your state is a witness against you. I often think that, if I really could know the condition of my unconverted hearers (thoroughly know it), it might be impossible for me to address them. I do try to realize the position of some of you, and to project my mind into the future which awaits you if you die without God, and without

hope. I am not about to give any terrible descriptions of the world to come; but, remember, the most terrible I could give would fall infinitely short of what the reality must be. If I could realize that dreadful future more fully, this tongue might be silent through the horror of my heart's emotions. I pray you, therefore, by that terror which we experience in speaking to you, let it stand as a witness against the sin which will bring upon you such misery. We cannot bear to think of that which awaits you. Holy Whitefield, when he began to touch upon that subject, would, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, cry "The wrath to come! The wrath to come!" It was too much for him. He could but repeat those words, and there cease. *We* feel for you, if you will not feel for yourselves. There are those present who never bow the knee at night without praying for the unconverted with great burden of spirit. I know some here, strong men, whom I have seen overcome with sacred passion when they have agonized for you, and for the souls of the ungodly. It has not been merely a plentiful stream of tears bedewing their manly cheeks, but their hearts have heaved within their bosoms, and their whole being has been convulsed with agony of spirit, lest, peradventure, you should perish.

All the praying people in the world I set as an assembly against you. Shall they pray for you, and will you never pray for yourselves? Shall horror seize them on account of your sins, and shall no horror ever seize you? Shall a godly mother waste—no, it is not waste, shall she spend nights in tears for your soul, and will you never weep the tear of repentance? Shall we plead with you with all the eagerness our heart is capable of, and search for words with which to plead with you, and feel that we have done all too little when we have done our best to persuade you—shall we do all this, and yet will you say, "It is nothing to me. It is nothing to me"? Well, then, if it must be so, I can only say that I set the whole assembly of the living saints upon earth against you. Let them have some influence over you.

"Ah!" say you, "but there are many hypocrites amongst them." Very well, they shall go over to your side: you shall be welcome to them; but all the sincere I set against you.

"But it is not the sincere only that pray." Very well, you shall have all the insincere. Poor company! I wonder you should claim them; but still, every sincere believer does, as it were, when he pleads with God, protest against you that your knees are never bent, and your hearts never cry to God as the Father of spirits. Some live week after week, and month after month, and year after year, without prayer. The very Mahometans and heathen rebuke you: they dare not live a single day without their prayers. You are worse than they are. The little chick, as it drinks at the stream, lifts its head as though to thank God. You are worse than the poor fowls. You have become like the swine under the oak, which search for the acorns, but never think of the tree. You receive the mercies of God, but never give thanks to the Giver. O conscience, if there be conscience left, cry shame upon the man who dares to live without God! I set the prayerful, then, against you.

But next, I have another mighty squadron to call. I set against

unconverted men *all the inspired writers of the Old and New Testaments.* Let them come up, one by one, and speak as they were wont to do. Not one has a word of comfort for a man that will not repent of his sins. "Mercy," they will all cry, to the man that accepts the atoning sacrifice; but if he will not believe in Jesus, with one chorus, all the prophets, and the apostles too, will say, "Woe, woe, woe, woe unutterable to the man that lives and dies without Christ!" The universal consent of all the men that ever spake as the Spirit moved them is against the ungodly.

But I mention a larger host than either of these, and that is, *the departed saints.* Oh, could you see them this day in their white robes, could you hear their sacred song, it were a sight worth dying to behold; and the sound—it were worth losing all the voices of earth in the silence of death to hear! But suppose you, an unconverted person, should seek a friend amongst that blood-washed host. I will picture you beholding them as they stand in their glorious ranks, and you say, "I am an enemy to God, I am prayerless, I am impenitent, I am graceless, and I intend to remain so; which among you all will be a friend to me?" Not an eye will glance upon you, except with indignation; not a hand will be put out to grasp you. There! March down that long file, look into those joyous faces, and see if you can find among them all a trace of sympathy with your obstinate rebellion. Ask them; conjure them to come and assist you in your sins, or to comfort you in your impenitence. Is there one that will do it? I set the whole assembly against you. And there stands one—you remember her, for though she is strangely changed, and the beatific vision makes every part of her to shine so gloriously, yet you know her. It was your mother, who wept over you in childhood, and who died with prayers for you upon her lips. Ask her whether, if you live and die unconverted, she will be your friend; and that face, which you have often gazed upon with affection, and which was always full of love to you, is turned from you. What has she to do, even with her child, if that child is an heir of wrath? She loves the Saviour too much to side with the Saviour's enemies. On earth she could weep and pray for you: in heaven she has other work to do, and has undergone such an absorption into the will of God that, if your spirit should pass into another world unrenewed, she, with those dear lips, would say, "Amen!" most solemnly to your condemnation. She, too, will confess, with all the army of the faithful, that the sentence would be just. There is not one of all you knew on earth who is now in heaven who can love you, unless you are renewed and changed in heart. I have sought with many of you, many times, to put the truth as plainly as I could, and to speak as earnestly as I could; but, once past the portal, and you are gone into another world, no preacher shall ever trouble you there. Go down to the shades of death and hell, and no earnest voices shall ever plead with you there. You shall have nobody to ridicule as a fanatic there. You shall hear no sermons of which you can say, "How the man seems to rave!" Ah, no! you shall have other company, and other engagements, but all God's ministers will be against you; and, as long as you remain ungodly here, they are against you. I set the whole host of the redeemed in heaven

before you now, and challenge you, by all their glory, to turn from the error of your way, lest that glory should only increase your misery by contrast.

I have to add to all these saints on earth, and glorified spirits in heaven, *the whole company of the angels.* They are the friends and companions of the saints, but they are by no means the friends of the ungodly. They would rejoice over you if you repented; but, while you do not repent, it seems to me as if full often the angels, as they fulfil their errands among us, must feel tempted to cry, "Great God of vengeance, let us draw our swords, and let us smite these rebels!" There stands a man who the other day cursed God, and dared him to blast his limbs. If there had been an angel passing by, and doubtless it might have been so, I wonder he did not pause, suspended in mid-air, in very horror. I should not wonder if he felt in his soul that it was poison to him to be near to such a man, and would fain have drawn the mighty sword, which seraphs wield, to cut the man down. The angels are against you. No one of the sacred host is friend to the man who is the foe of God.

The worst is to come: *God is against you.* "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." He would fain have you saved. He has sworn with an oath, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." But if you will not turn, you must burn. If you will not repent, you must perish. God has said it, and he will not lie. Justice demands it, and the Judge of all the earth must be just.

And, to crown all, *Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is against you* if you resolve to be the enemy of God. He loves sinners: he died for sinners: he is ever willing to receive them; but as long as they remain impenitent and unbelieving, he cannot love their sin, he cannot love them, viewing them in the light of wilful, persistent rebels. And when he comes in the latter days, you know what will happen to those that loved not Christ: they will be *Anathema Maranatha*—cursed at his coming. He himself will say it; and it appals me to have to remind you of the fact—he himself, whose gentle lips were like lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, tender as a woman's—he himself, when he comes, will say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" You will find no friend in Christ in that last tremendous day. He will break you in pieces with a rod of iron, as potters' vessels are broken into shivers. So, then, I set this great assembly against you: saints on earth and saints in heaven, the angels, and God, and Christ himself against you.

Who is there for you? Who is there on your side, O enemies of God? It is as dreadful to think of those who are for you as of those who are against you; for those who are for you, and on your side, are the ungodly, like yourselves; and the lost in hell, who are now what you must be, except you escape; and the devil and his angels, themselves punished for their sins. A grim assembly, surely, those that are for you! Methinks a man should start up and say—"I cannot abide in such company as this! Do I sail in this pirate's vessel, with such a dreadful crew on board, and Satan for captain? In God's name I will jump overboard,

and swim to another ship, for in this vessel I will never stay, and under this black flag I will never fight, let the bribe be as high as it may. I cannot serve Satan, and I will not." Friends, if such be your language, I stand here, as a servant of Jesus, and hold above you the blood-stained banner of Christ's cross. Oh, ye who will take the enlisting-money, here it is: come and take it, for whosoever receives Christ—receives him by trusting him—to him is given power to become a servant of Christ, and a soldier of the cross; and then I shall have no assembly to set against him, but the same august assembly shall be on the side of the man saved by faith in Jesus! God grant that these words may be found useful, and Christ shall have the glory!

For a few minutes I will vary the strain, but keep closely to the same idea. *Some say that sin is a very pleasant and profitable thing:* indeed, many profess to be of that opinion nowadays. I may have some here, particularly some young men just commencing life, who are fascinated by the charms of London life, and have begun to sip of the dangerous wine which is vended in the house of the strange woman. To them it seems that vice is pleasure. O young man, I wish I had thee in a room alone, that I might speak to thee, for some things that I would say earnestly to thee in private I must but hint at in a public assembly. The results of sin are not such as I can speak of here. Thou art under great delusions. If thou thinkest sin will give thee pleasure, I will set an assembly against thee concerning this dream. Oh, what an assembly it would be if I could bring up from the hospitals the wretches who are suffering an earthly hell from their sins! Have I not seen them? Have I not seen them crawling through the earth, creatures that dare not look up, broken down with hypochondriasis, desponding and despairing, with that despair which nothing but vice ever brings on man? Have I not seen them when their very bones have rotted through their sin? There are diseases which are the stamp and seal of the curse of the Eternal upon transgression. There are diseases which are the big first drops of the everlasting rain of hell's tremendous tempest. If there were a physician or a surgeon here, he could tell you that there are sins which are commonly practised, which bring on men, even in this life, a penalty most terrible. The furnace of hell devours; but, like Nebuchadnezzar's guards, men in this life are made to fall down, slain by the powerful heat that glows from the eternal burnings, when God suffers a portion of the results of sin to come upon them in this life. Could I not bring up here to-night, if it were fit and proper, spendthrifts, who squandered their early days in all manner of dissoluteness, and who have brought themselves to rags and disease? Go over the casual ward, enter the union-house, spend an evening in a low lodging-house, and sit down and hear the tales of sons of ministers, of sons of gentlemen, of sons of noblemen, of men that once were merchants, traders, lawyers, doctors, who have brought themselves down by nothing else than their own extravagance and sin, to eat the bread of pauperism, and to know the lack even of that bitter fare. Tell me sin is pleasure! If it be, you can have too much of it; but it is bitterness before long, and they are wise who flee from it.

"Well, well," cries one, "we are not all lovers of that kind of

sin." Indeed, I hope you are not: I, too, refused such sins, but I had other sins—the world would not call them sins, but they were such—and when, before I found the Saviour, I began to discover what sin was (I speak what I do know), my sins, to me in my consciousness, were a little hell. I know that men who are not saved, sometimes on a dark night, or in sickness, or in trouble, or when alone, will permit conscience to work, and they feel dreadfully uneasy. Have I not seen your cheek blanch when you have been told that your friend was dead? When the funeral knell has been tolling, have you not wished yourself in the depths of the forest, that you might not hear it? When you have been compelled to sit a little while alone, you feared to allow your mind to meditate upon eternity; but you tried to fly off again to the frivolities of time, though you felt there was nothing in them. Sin is a wretched thing, unsatisfying at best. Even painted sins, with their Jezebel faces, are not truly beautiful. What men call immoralities are wretched in themselves, upon the outside; and a grain of common-sense will enable a man to see that their misery far exceeds their pleasure. I set an assembly against the man who declares that there is pleasure in iniquity.

On the other hand, *it is said that true religion makes people miserable.* I would set an assembly against anybody who dares to say that. It was in my mind to ask you who are unhappy through being Christians, to bear witness to-night against Christianity; and then I thought perhaps I would put it the other way; and let those of you who love the Saviour, and find consolation and happiness in him, sing with me one of our joyous hymns; and I warrant you, sirs, we would make this great dome resound with hearty music. Unhappy! Unhappy through being Christians! I have suffered as much of bodily pain as most here present, and I know also about as much of depression of spirit at times as anyone; but my Master's service is a blessed service, and faith in him makes my heart leap for joy. I would not change with the most healthy man, or the most wealthy man, or the most learned man, or the most eminent man in all the world, if I had to give up my faith in Jesus Christ—tried as it sometimes is. Ah! it is a blessed thing to be a Christian, and all God's people will tell you so. It is ofttimes our lot to go to see the sick, but sick believers usually cheer our heart. There is a seat just below that used to be occupied by a beloved sister, well-known to you, whom I went to visit in her sickness; and I do assure you, when she was in a consumption, and near to death, I never spent a happier hour than I did with her. And only last week, or ten days ago, when I sat down with her, and she could scarcely speak, yet what she did say was as full of sacred joy as words could compass. She is in heaven now, and heaven was in her then. "So much farther on have I got," said she, "to the better land—so many the fewer of these hard breaths to fetch, and so many the fewer of these hard pains to bear. I shall soon be where Jesus is;" and she talked as freely about dying, and going home, as I should talk of going to my own house when this service is ended. Before she fell asleep yesterday, about twelve o'clock, she said to those about her she felt strangely as if she were going through a river. At one time she said she was in the midst of it, the floods were round about her;

and soon she said, in intervals of consciousness, "I am going up the other side; the waters are shallower: I am mounting the other bank." At length she cried, "Jesus is coming for me! I can hear the music of heaven!" Her heart seemed to be overpowered with some sweet mystic melody, which, if it did not enter her soul by the ear, at any rate reached her inmost spirit by some other channel. "I can hear them sing! I can hear them sing!" she said, "and when Jesus comes, don't keep him waiting for me; don't wish me to stop. Let me go." She is gone. Never one I think suffered more in dying, and never had a consumptive more difficulty in breathing. Thank God, they do not often suffer as much as she did; yet there was never one more calm, more comfortable, and more joyous on the bed of death than this daughter of affliction.

I believe in God without any evidence except himself, and his own revelation of himself to my soul; but yet I thank God for evidences, and among those most helpful to me are the death-beds of believers. It does my soul great good to see the Lord's people depart this life. I grieve that you should be taken away to heaven, for we want you here; but ah! if the departure of any of you shall be so sweet as those I have been privileged to witness of late, I shall come to my pulpit boldly. If the religion that I teach makes men and women die like this, I am not ashamed to preach it. If the faith that I have delivered to them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, makes them so triumphant in the last article of death, I will deliver nothing else, but still continue to tell them to trust simply in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and rest wholly and only there. I say, then, by the living saints that do rejoice, and by the dying saints who die without a fear, I set an assembly against the man who dares to slander true religion by saying that it does not make men happy.

I had many other things to say, but it were well to leave you where you are, only praying you, by the shortness of time, by the suddenness of death, by the certainty of judgment, by the terrors of hell, by the glories of heaven, by the value of your own souls, by the blood of Jesus, and by the glory of the eternal God, to cease being his enemies. Seek ye his face. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" for "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." From that, God save you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah i. 1—20.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—387, 34, 514.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HELP FOR YOUR SICKNESS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."—Matthew viii. 16, 17.

It was the evening: in all probability it was the evening of a Sabbath-day. The Jews were so tender not to break the Sabbath that they did not even bring forth the sick to the Saviour until the even was come. The Saviour would gladly have healed them on the Sabbath-day, for that was to him a high day for holy work, but they did not think it right, and so they kept back their sick till the day was ended. If any of you have thought that the time has not come for you to approach the Saviour, you have laboured under a great error, for he would not have you delay for a single hour; but I hope you are now satisfied that you have waited long enough, and that at last the evening is near in which you should come to Jesus. God grant that any superstition which has kept you back may be removed; and may this be the set time, the hour of grace to your souls!

Whether it was a Sabbath-evening or not, the day had been spent by the Saviour in diligent labour; for our Saviour took care, when the people would listen to him on the seventh day, to preach with all his might. As soon as the sun was up, he began to tell out saving truth. He was tired when evening was come, and he might have sought rest; but instead of that, they brought out the sick to him to heal, and he must close up a weary day by a yet more arduous task. Until darkness had covered the earth, he must continue still to scatter blessings right and left. At this hour our blessed Master has laid aside all weariness; and now at eventide he is waiting to bless. Whatever has been done during the day, yet if some poor, weary soul has spurned the voice divine through all the former hours, he is waiting still to save, ere yet the sun has quite gone down. When even was come, they brought unto him those that were sick. We are in like case. Let us put up this prayer to him, "O thou who didst

bless the sick in the evening, come now and bless us while all is cool and still, and let us find thy salvation!"

What a strange sight that evening saw! They brought forth to the Saviour those that were possessed of evil spirits, and those that were sick. They brought them on their mattresses, and laid them in the streets. It must have been a very difficult thing to bring out some that were possessed, because they struggled and raved; but nevertheless they brought them. The streets were turned into a hospital, and in the still evening air you could hear the cries of those poor creatures who were possessed of evil spirits, and the moans of those in acute pain. It was a sad sight, a piteous sight, to look upon; and as far as Christ's eye could see, every nook and corner were occupied with these sick people. But what a glorious thing it must have been to see him, the divine Physician, with tears of pity in his eyes, and yet with beaming joy on his countenance; suffering intensely all the while because of their suffering, and yet joyous because he was able to bless them. You see him go along, and lay his hand on one sick man, and he leaped up from the bed; and you hear him speak to another, and the foul spirit fled, and he that was madness itself became calm and rational. See him cast a look over yonder, and with that glance he expels the fever. Hear him speak a word to one far away, and, with that word he dries up dropsy, or opens a blind eye. It was grand to see the Saviour thus fighting with Satan and with foul diseases, and everywhere victorious. That was one of the happiest evenings that ever ended day in Palestine. I want you to feel that we can have its parallel to-night. We have Jesus here. We have been seeking him. There are some here who dwell with him. Jesus is here, and the sick folk are here, and he is just as able to heal to-night as he was in days gone by.

I am going to speak about *his works of healing*, and to draw encouragement therefrom; and then we shall go into *the explanation of his power to heal*, which is given us in the second verse of our text: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."

I. Let us notice, first, OUR LORD'S WORKS OF HEALING. On that occasion, and on many others, he cured *all sorts of sickness*. I think I am right in saying that there is not in the whole list of diseases one which the Saviour did not heal. They may be known by new names, for they say the doctors have invented a dozen new diseases lately; but they are only old diseases to which they have given new names. Our great grandfathers died of diseases the names of which they never knew, or else they had other names than those which are given to them now. But as man has always been much the same, most diseases have continued as long as the human race. We have to be very grateful that leprosy, which was the great scourge of the Jews, is almost extinct now; but in our Saviour's day it seems to have been exceedingly common. But leprosy and all forms of disease came under the Saviour's power, and fled at his word.

Now the parallel of that is this—Jesus Christ can forgive sins of all sorts. There are different grades of sin. Some are exceedingly defiling and loathsome. Other sins are scarcely hurtful to the general commonwealth, and so are often almost unnoticed. Yet any sin will

ruin a soul for ever. It may be thought to be little, but as a little prick with a poisoned arrow will heat all the blood, and bring on death, so is sin such a venomous disease that the least of it is fatal. But from whatever kind of sin you are suffering, I would encourage you to come to Jesus with it, be it what it may. Is yours an extreme case? Have you been grossly guilty? Come with it, then, for our Lord healed the worst diseases. On the other hand, have you been kept out of gross sin from your early youth? Have you been preserved from outward vice? It may be that your chief sin is the forgetting of God, and living without love to Christ—a deadly sin, let me tell you; but bring it to the Saviour. Have you been idle? Have you been proud? Have you been lascivious? Have you been untruthful? Have you been profane? Have you been malicious? I cannot tell; but God knoweth—who can read your heart as readily as we read a book. But whatever the sin may be, remember that all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Oh, hear this, and look up to the Saviour, and pray him of his great mercy to exercise the healing art of his redeeming love on you, this evening, now that the sun has set! They brought to Jesus all sorts of diseases.

Note, next, that Jesus can deal with *special cases of devilry*. Possession with evil spirits was probably peculiar to that age. I sometimes think that, when the Saviour came down on earth, the devil had the impudence to ask to be let loose, that he and all his servants might come on earth, and in person might meet the Saviour. Satan is still busy, going about, seeking whom he may devour; but not exactly in the particular way in which he raged in Christ's day. He cannot take possession of men's bodies as he did then. So the Saviour met Satan foot to foot, and face to face; but the devil made a poor fight of it, for whenever the Lord Jesus made his appearance, the devil wanted to be off; and if he did not want to go, the Saviour soon moved him by saying, "Come out of him." Like a whipped dog, he did not dare to make a sound, but fled. A whole legion of demons were glad to get into a herd of swine, and ran violently down a steep place into the sea, to escape from the frown of our Lord. Satan had found somebody that was more than a match for him. The parallel to that is this. There are some men that we meet with, in whom the devil evidently reigns; and there are such women too—for when women are bad, they can be bad, and there can be no mistake about it. The devil can make more mischief out of a woman than out of a man when he thoroughly gets possession of her. Well, whether men or women, there are some who might be called "the devil's own." One man is a drunkard: there is no holding him; he must drink on; he seems to be infatuated by it. He takes the pledge, and abstains for a little while; but by-and-by the devil gets hold of him again, and he goes back to his taps. Though he has drunk himself into delirium tremens, and to death's door, yet still he gives way to this loathsome vice. Others are possessed with the devil of lasciviousness, and it does not matter what they suffer; they will be always defiling themselves, ruining body and soul by their iniquity. We know persons who seem to have a devil in them in the matter of passion. They are

but a little provoked, and they lose all command of themselves, and you would think that they ought to be put in a padded room in Bethlehem Hospital, and kept there till they cooled down. Otherwise, they might do mischief to themselves and to others. Surely some men, who can scarcely speak without swearing, have the devil in them. How one's blood runs chill, in going down our streets, to hear how commonly our working-men degrade themselves with filthy conversation! It is not exactly cursing: it is less honest, and more vile! Is there any hope for such? These are the very people in whom Jesus Christ has often displayed his healing power. I could tell you to-night of lions that have been turned to lambs, men of furious passions who have become gentle, and quiet, and loving, men of profane speech who would be shocked at the very remembrance of what they once said, and whose voices have been often heard in prayer: men and women, too, who loved the wages of iniquity, and lost their character, and defiled themselves; but they are washed, and they are sanctified. I have blessed the name of God when giving the right hand of Christian fellowship to ransomed ones to whom we could not have given our right hand a little while ago, for it would have been wrong to join with them in the wickedness of their pursuits. Oh, yes, my Master still casts devils out of men! If there are any such here to-night, let your cry for help go up to our blessed Master. Come again, great Lord, and cast out the evil spirit from men, and get to thyself the victory in many a heart, to the praise of the glory of thy grace!

The remarkable point about this miracle-working was that *all were healed, and there was no failure.* When a man brings out a patent medicine, he publishes verifications of the efficacy of his physic. He gets a number of cases, and he advertises them. I suppose they are genuine. I should not like to be hanged if they were not. I suppose, therefore, they are all accurate and authentic. But there is one thing which you never knew a medicine advertiser do: he never advertises the failures of the medicine. The number of persons that have been induced to buy the remedy, and have derived no good from it: if these were all advertised, it might occupy more room in the newspaper than those who write of a cure. My Lord Jesus Christ is a Physician who never had a failure yet—never once. Never did a soul wash in Christ's blood without being made whiter than snow. Never did a man, besotted with the worst of vice, trust in Jesus without receiving power to conquer his evil habits. Not even in the lowest pit of hell is there one that dares to say, "I trusted Christ, and I am lost. I sought his face with all my heart, and he cast me away." There is not a man living that could say that, unless he dared to lie; for not one has with heart and soul sought the Saviour, and trusted in him, and then had a negative from him. He must save you if you trust him. As surely as he lives he must save you, for he has put it, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." I will repeat it, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." You have never come if he has not received you; for he must save those who trust in him.

Notice, that *his word was the sole medicine he used:* "He cast out the

spirits with his word." No other medicine, no charms, no long performances, no striking of his hand over the place; but he spake, and it was done. He said to the devil, "Come out of him"; and it came out. He said to the disease, "Go"; and away it went. In that way the Lord saves men to-day—by his word. While I am speaking it to-night, or when you shall be reading it, his word will be the power of God unto salvation. I am glad that you are here to hear it, for faith cometh by hearing. I shall be glad if you diligently read it, for reading is a kind of hearing, and many are brought to the Saviour thereby. Jesus Christ does not need to put you through a long purgatory, and keep you for months getting ready to be saved. He has only this night to open your ear to hear his word, and when you hear it he can bless it to your soul so that you shall live, and your sin shall die; and you shall become changed and renewed by his matchless grace.

I speak his word to-night, praying that he will make it effectual, as he has done aforetime; and to him shall be the praise.

We have the same medicine to-night that Jesus used, for we have his word. We have got himself here in answer to the prayers of his people, and we have the same sort of sick people here; and therefore we expect to see the same wonders wrought.

II. May God give you a hearing ear, and save you while I speak, secondly, of OUR LORD'S PERSONAL POWER TO HEAL! Whence came it that he was able to save? We are pointed to the secret of his power by these words, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias, the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."

Christ was able to heal the diseases of men, because he bare them himself. Do not think that our Lord Jesus was actually diseased: he suffered greatly, but I read not that any disease was upon him. Probably there was no man in whom there was less tendency to natural disease than in him. His pure and blessed body was not subject to the diseases which are brought upon men through sin being in them. How, then, did he take upon him our sicknesses and our sorrows?

First, *he bare our sicknesses by intense sympathy.* When Christ looked at all those sick people, he did, as it were, take all their sicknesses upon himself. You know what I mean. If you talk with a person who is very ill, and you feel for him, you seem to lay his pains upon yourself, and then you have power to comfort him. When I am seeing troubled people, I enter into one sorrowful case after another till I am more sad than any of them. I try as far as I can to have fellowship with the case of each one, in order to be able to speak a word of comfort to him; and I can say, from personal experience, that I know of nothing that wears the soul down so fast as the outflow of sincere sympathy with the sorrowing, desponding, depressed ones. I have sometimes been the means in God's hand of helping a man who suffered with a desponding spirit; but the help I have rendered has cost me dearly. Hours after, I have been myself depressed, and I have felt an inability to shake it off. You and I have not a thousandth part of the sympathy that was in Christ. He

sympathized with all the aggregate of human woe, and so sympathized that he made his heart a great reservoir, into which all streams of grief poured themselves. My Master is just the same now. Though he is in heaven, he is just as tender as he was on earth. I never heard of anybody losing tenderness by going to heaven. People get better by going there; and so is Christ, if it were possible, even more tender than when on earth. Think of this. Somebody might not sympathize with you, poor sinner, but Jesus does. You would not like to tell some people what you have done, for they would turn upon their heel, and give you a wide berth, but it is not so with Jesus. He looks upon sin, not with the eye of a judge, but with the eye of a physician. He looks at it as a disease, and he deals with it that he may heal it. He has great sympathy with sinners, though he has no sympathy with sin. He takes the sinner's sorrows to himself.

"Ah!" says one, "no man careth for my soul." Dear friend, man or woman, whoever you may be, One greatly cares for you, and he speaks to you to-night by these lips. Oh, that these lips were better fitted to be used by him! He says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." He bids you take of the water of life freely. He is ready at this moment to bestow salvation.

"Nobody knows my case," cries one. But Jesus knows it. He knows that dark spot in it. He knows that hard core which will not come away. He knows that filthy thing which you remember to-night, and shiver as you remember it. He knows it all, and yet he says, "Return, thou backsliding daughter." He bids the vilest of the vile come to him, for he has sympathy with them still.

Jesus Christ took upon himself our sicknesses by his championship of our humanity. Satan misled our first parents, and the powers of darkness held us captive. In consequence of sin we have become sick and infirm, and liable to suffer.

Now, when our Lord Jesus came on earth, he as good as said, "I am the Seed of the woman; and I have come to bruise the head of men's adversary." So Christ, in that respect, took upon himself all the consequences which come of sin. He stood forth as the Champion of fallen manhood, to fight Satan, and cast him out of men's bodies; to battle with disease, and to overthrow the evil which lies at the root of it, that men might be made healthy.

He is our Champion still. I delight to preach him to you, ye suffering, ye sorrowing, ye sinful, ye lost, ye castaways! One has come who has taken up your cause, the sinner's Redeemer, next-of-kin to man, who has come to avenge him of his adversary, and to buy back his lost inheritance. Behold in Jesus the Champion of sinners, the David who comes and defies the Goliath that has long afflicted men. Oh, I wish you would trust our glorious Champion! Remember how he met the adversary alone, and vanquished him. "'Twas on that dark, that dreadful night." The enemy sprang upon him in the garden like a lion, and the Saviour received him on his breast. He brought the Saviour to his knees; but there he grasped the lion, hugged him, crushed him, rent him, and flung him from him. Our Samson sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down

to the ground; and though he had won that victory, he afterwards bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. He lives, however, now again, the Champion of the cause of all the suffering, the sorrowing, and the sinful, if they will but come and put their case into his hands. He himself took our sicknesses and our infirmities, by championing our cause, and standing in our place to fight our battles. Give him *your* cause, trust *your* soul in his hands, and he will redeem *you* out of the jaw of the lion, yea, out of the very mouth of hell.

But here is the pith of the whole matter. The reason why Jesus is able to heal all the mischief that sin has wrought is this—because *he himself took our sin upon him by his sacred substitution.* Sin is the root of our infirmities and diseases; and so, in taking the root, he took all the bitter fruit which that root did bear. Oh, tell it out again, and tell it out again, and tell it every day, and tell it in the dead of night, and tell it in the glare of noonday, and tell it in the market, and tell it in the street, and tell it everywhere, that God took sin from off the back of sinners, and laid it on his innocent and only-begotten Son! O mystery divine, never to be known if God had not revealed it; and not even now to be believed if God himself had not assured us of it! He laid sin upon Christ. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Hearken, then, ye guilty ones! Hear how freely God can forgive, and yet not injure his justice. If you trust Christ, you may be sure that you are among the number of those whose sins were laid on Christ. He was punished in your room, and place, and stead. Now, it is not just that, if another was punished in your stead, you should be punished too; and therefore the very justice of God requires that, if Christ suffered in your stead, you should not suffer. See you that?

"But did he suffer in my stead?" I must answer this question by another, "Dost thou believe that Jesus is the Christ? Wilt thou trust thy soul with him?" Well, if thou dost, thy transgressions are not thine, for they were laid on him. They are not on thee, for, like everything else, they cannot be in two places at one time; and if they were laid on Christ, they are not laid on you. But what did Jesus do with the sins that were laid on him? Can they not come back to us? No, never; for he took them to the sepulchre, and there he buried them for ever. And now, what saith the Scripture? "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found." "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions; and, as a cloud, thy sins." "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Our sins are gone. Christ has carried them away. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Believers are the seed for whom the victory has been gained. They are the seed to whom the promise is sure. It is not to those who are of works, but to those who are of faith. Those that are born again, of the Spirit of God, through faith which is in Christ Jesus—these are "redeemed from among men." Suppose I owed ten thousand pounds: if a dear friend should call on my creditor, and pay that ten

thousand pounds for me, I should then owe the creditor nothing. I could meet him with a smiling face. He may to-morrow morning bring his account-books if he likes, and say, "There, you see, there are ten thousand pounds down there against you." I would joyfully answer, "Yes; but look on the other side. You have been paid. Here are the words at the foot of your bill, 'Received in full of all demands.'" Now, when Jesus took the sins of believers upon himself, he discharged them by his death; and every man that believes has the receipt in full in our Lord's resurrection. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Yea, those that believe in Christ have the complete forgiveness of every sin. As for me, I like to sing with Kent—

> "Here's pardon for transgressions past,
> It matters not how black their cast;
> And O my soul, with wonder view,
> For sins to come here's pardon too!"

All blotted out at once with one stroke of the sacred pen—obliterated once for all. God does not again lay to the charge of men what he has once forgiven them. He does not forgive them half their sins, and visit them for the rest; but, once given, the blessing is irrevocable; as it is written. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." He never draws back, nor repents of what he has done. He saves, and the salvation which saves is everlasting salvation.

Now I see why Christ can heal. Dear heart, you have come here to-night full of the disease of sin, and you are saying, "Will he heal me?" Look to him! Look to him! Look to him! The morning that I found Christ I did not think to find him. I went to hear the word as I had heard it before; but I did not hope to find Jesus there and then. Yet I did find him. When I heard that there was nothing to be done but simply to look to Jesus; and when the exhortation came so sharp, and shrill, and clear, "Look! look! look!" I looked, and I bear witness to the change that passed over me—such a change as though I died and rose again. And such a change, my hearer, shall pass over thee if thou believest.

> "There is life for a look at the Crucified One;
> There is life at this moment for thee."

God give thee the look, and give thee the life, even now, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah liii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—410, 568, 296.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HOPE FOR YOUR FUTURE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings."—Ezekiel xxxvi. 11.

These words were spoken to the mountains, and valleys, and rivers of Judah; and we know that the Lord careth not for hills and rivers, but he speaketh altogether for the sake of his people. The blessing to the land was intended to be a blessing to the people. We shall do no violence to the text if we take the promise as belonging to ourselves, and plead it before the mercy-seat, trusting that the Lord will do this unto us, and that our latter end may be better than our beginning.

Have you ever noticed that when nations fall they seldom rise again? Babylon and Nineveh become mountains of rubbish. If the Medo-Persian kingdom falls, the throne is never revived. If Greece and ancient Rome cease from their eminence, we see no more of them than their ruins. But God's people are not numbered amongst the nations, so that when Israel falls she revives again. Though for many centuries the ancient people have been scattered and peeled, derided and despised, yet every Israelite may put down his foot with joyous tread, and say, "No, Israel, thou shalt never perish!" Even in her ashes live her wonted fires, and the days shall come when Israel shall own her Messiah, and her God will fulfil the promise of the text, "I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings; and ye shall know that I am the Lord." I believe that to be the first sense of the passage; but since all the blessings of the covenant, which belong to the seed according to the flesh, do spiritually belong to all those who are in that covenant according to the spirit, we shall take this word as spoken to all believers.

If a hypocrite falls, he falls like Lucifer, never to hope again. He is a meteor, that flashes across the sky and disappears; a wandering star, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. Let Judas fall from his apostleship, and there is no restoring the son of perdition. But how different is the case of God's own, when they fall! Alas, that they should do so! Yet of them it is said, "Rejoice not

against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise." Peter, at a look from his Master, wept bitterly, and lived to say, "Thou knowest that I love thee." There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, for there is life in it; and where there is life there is hope. If Mordecai be of the royal seed, the enemy shall never prevail against him. There may come dark times of backsliding, but surely the redeemed of the Lord shall come again with mourning and repenting, and they shall seek unto him from whom they have wandered.

I am not, however, going to dwell much upon the dark side of the subject of declension; but I shall invite your attention to the gracious promise that God will make things better for us than they were at our beginnings. First, I shall answer the question, *what is there, then, so good in our beginnings?* In the second place, *if so good, can anything be better?* And, in the third place, *how can we secure these better things*, so that our life shall verify the statement of the text, "I will do better unto you than at your beginnings"?

I. WHAT IS THERE, THEN, SO GOOD IN OUR BEGINNINGS? Let us look back. Some of us have been converted to God for a good number of years now; and all that while we have enjoyed spiritual life. Others are young beginners, but their present enjoyment will assist them to answer the question—What is there so good about those first days? We read of our first love as "the love of our espousals"; and we all know there was something specially charming about those first hours when forgiving love was precious to us, and we rejoiced in the Lord.

One choice enjoyment was our *vivid sense of pardon.* We knew that we were forgiven: we had not the shadow of a doubt of it. We were black so lately that, being washed from our stains, we saw the change. It would not have been possible for Satan then to make us doubt it. When we stood at the cross-foot, and said, "Thus my sins were washed away," then things went well with us. When substitution was a novelty to us, and when we seemed to hear a voice like that of the angels before the throne, singing, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,"—we all knew then that we had looked to Jesus, for we felt that we could look nowhere else. We were newly-cleansed sinners, and we knew it. Oh, that blessed period! Our earthly comforts were forgotten in the greater sweetness, and our earthly sorrows ceased because guilt was gone. Taken out of the bonds of iniquity, our hearts danced at the very sound of the redeeming name. You sang, "I am forgiven: I am forgiven." You wanted to tell the angels this strange wonder of almighty love. That was one of the good things of your beginning.

You recollect very well, too, that you had then *a delicious enjoyment of the good things of the covenant of grace.* You did not know a tenth of what you know now, but you intensely enjoyed what you did know. When the Israelites first of all came into Canaan, they found it to be a land that flowed with milk and honey. It became afterwards a stony land through their sins, but rare clusters then grew in Eshcol, and the wild bees made honey plentifully, even in such a strange place as the carcase of a lion. When we first came to Christ, it was so with us as to the

things of God; they were all sweets. We saw one covenant blessing, then another, and then another; and we were enraptured with each one. Whether in the body or out of the body we could scarcely tell; for we did not look then without tasting, and we did not taste then without feasting, and we did not feast then without feasting again. We grudged the world the hours we spent in business: we wanted to get back to our Bibles, or to the assembly of the saints. Our Lord was a precious Christ then, and exceeding lovely in our eyes, that had been so newly opened. Everything about him, and his people, and his Word, and his day, and his cross was astonishing to us, and filled us with an intensity of delight. It was "happy day" indeed with us then. That was another blessed point in our beginnings.

And, at that time, we were like the children of Israel in a third matter, namely, that *we had repeated victories*. Do you recollect when your Jericho fell down—when a high walled-up sin, that you feared would never yield to you, was brought down suddenly? As Israel went from victory to victory, and slew king after king, so in those early days did you. As quickly as conscience revealed a sin, you smote it as with a two-edged sword. You sometimes wondered at professors that they could live as they did. You felt *you* could not. Your hand was in for fighting; and, like Joshua, you did not stay it. The day was not long enough for you in which to slay your sin; you felt inclined to bid the sun stand still, and the moon to rest, that you might make full work of blessed carnage in putting sin altogether to the sword. You have had a good many defeats since then, it may be, for which you cannot excuse yourself; but then "Victory!" was your watchword, and you went on to realize it in the name of the eternal God. From day to day, though attacked by the uprising of corruptions, you said, "In the name of the Lord will I destroy them," and you sometimes cried like her of old, "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!" You marvelled to see how the adversary was subdued beneath the foot of your faith. Those were good times, were they not—those beginnings?

In those days, you had *great delight in prayer*. When alone with Christ, it was heaven below; and in the prayer-meetings, when God's people were warm at heart, how you delighted to unite with them! The preaching was marrow and fatness to you. You did not mind walking a long way on a wet night to hear about your Lord and Master then. It may be there was no cushion to the seat, or you had to stand in the aisle. You did not mind that. You are getting wonderfully dainty now; you cannot hear the poor preacher whose voice was once like music to you. You cannot enjoy the things of God as once you did. Whose fault is that? The kitchen is the same, and the food the same: the appetite has gone, I fear. How ravenous I was after God's Word—how I would wake early in the morning to read those books that are full of the deep things of God! I wanted none of your nonsensical novels, nor your weekly tales, for which some of you pine, like children for sugar-sticks. Then one fed on manna that came from heaven, on Christ himself. Those were good times in which everything was delightful. You heard a gospel preacher, and perhaps he spoiled the Queen's English; but you did not care a bit about that. You were

hungry, and you minded not the knives, and the table-cloths: you wanted meat, and plenty of it, and so long as it was good spiritual meat, your souls were delighted therewith. That is one of the good things of our beginnings.

In those days we were *full of living fruitfulness.* I hope we have not lost it. Just as the mountains of Judæa dropped with wine, and ran with milk, through the abundance of the soil, so was it with us then. We could do anything. Sometimes, in looking back, we wonder how we ever attempted so much. We were not so anxious to keep up our spiritual life as we were to spend what we had got. We thought then we would push the church before us, and drag the world behind us. What marvels we were going to do; ay, and we did many of them by God's good grace!

Then, if we had but little strength, yet we kept the Lord's Word. If we had but one talent, we made as much use of it, perhaps, as some do with ten. I love to see you young Christians as active as ever you can be; and I am going to put my hand on young heads, and say "This is right. Do all you can. You may not be so lively by-and-by." If you are not earnest when you begin, what will you be soon? I want you to maintain that earnestness, and to let it increase, for no man is doing too much for Jesus. No one is too consecrated, no one too self-denying, no one too enthusiastic. There has never been seen on the face of the earth yet a man who has laid himself out too much for the cause and kingdom of our Master. That will never be. But it is one of the good points of our beginnings that we were full of fruitfulness for the Lord our God.

This is because the saints begin generally with *abounding love.* Oh, how we loved the Saviour when first we discovered how he had loved us with an everlasting love! When we see that the dunghill is never to be our portion again, but yon bright glory at the right hand of the Eternal—oh, then we love our Saviour with all our hearts! I am not saying that we do not now love even more; but it is a good beginning when we overflow with love to our Lord Jesus.

II. I could thus keep on reminding you of the days gone by; but I do not care to do so. I am going now, in the second place, to answer the question, CAN ANYTHING BE BETTER THAN THIS?

Well, it would be a very great pity if there could not be, because I am sure we, when we were young beginners, were not much to boast of; and all the joy we had was, after all, but little compared with what is revealed in the Word of God. We ought to get to something better; and it would be a miserable thing if we were to get "small by degrees, and miserably less." It would not look like Christian perseverance if our light were to shine less and less unto the perfect darkness. No, but it is to shine more and more unto the perfect day; and in the beginning our day is only twilight. In coming to God at first we are only in the outer courts: we have not yet entered the holy of holies of inward experience: we stand in the outer court. We are wheat in the blade as yet. Ask the farmer whether he thinks that the green blade is the best thing on the farm. He says, "Yes, for the present"; but if it is a green blade next July, he will not think so. There is something better on before. All the good that God gives us draws

something better behind it. And let me whisper it: there is a best thing yet to come, not yet revealed unto eye or ear of saint, but it will be ours by-and-by when our Lord cometh.

In what respects, then, can our future be better than that which is behind? I answer very readily, *faith may be stronger*. By the grace of God it will be firmer and more robust. At first it shoots up like the lily, very beautiful, but fragile; afterwards it is like the oak with great roots that grip the soil, and rugged branches that defy the winds. Faith in the young beginner is soon cast down, and doubts and fears prevail; but if we grow in grace, we become rooted and grounded. In these days, when it is fashionable to sneer at the doctrines of Scripture, and nobody is thought to be sensible who believes anything, the young believer is apt to be staggered; but it would take a great many of the critics and divines of the present day, with all their scepticisms, to shake some of us. We have tasted, and handled, and lived upon these things; and being established in them, we are not to be moved from the hope of our calling. Though all the wiseacres in the world should dip their pens in tenfold darkness, and write it down as proven that there is no such thing as light, we have seen it with our eyes, and we live in it, and we are not to be moved from the eternal verities.

This is something better than early faith, is it not? Go on, and obtain it.

Again, God gives to his people, as they advance, *much more knowledge*. At first they enjoy what they know, but they hardly know what they enjoy. As we grow in grace we know more. We are surprised to see that what we thought to be one blessing is fifty blessings in one. We learn the art of dissecting truth—taking it to pieces, and seeing the different veins of divine thought that run through it; and then we see with delight blessing after blessing conveyed to us by the person and sacrifice of our exalted Lord. Brethren, if years and experience make us know more, our present is better than our beginnings.

Love to Christ gets to be more constant. It is a passion always, but with believers who grow in grace it comes to be a principle as well as a passion. If they are not always blazing with love, there is a good fire banked up within the soul. You know how you bank your fire up when you come to chapel of an evening, and have nobody at home, and want to keep the fire alight till you get home. That is often the condition of a Christian. Even if we do not talk much about assurance, and say nothing about getting near perfection, yet we lie humbly before God, and do not doubt that we love him. We are sure that we do, for it becomes a daily delight to us to speak with Christ; and, in the speaking, we feel our love glowing. You do not always feel that you love those whom you never see: but when you talk to the dear objects of your love, your heart is moved. As one of the old Puritans used to say, our graces are not apparent unless they are in exercise. You walk through a preserve, and there may be partridges and pheasants and hares all round you: you will not see them till one flies out of its hiding, or a hare starts up before you. You see them in motion; but while they were quiet in the copse, you did not observe

them. So may love to Christ and all Christian virtues lie concealed till they are called into action. Our Lord's dear presence attracts them all out of their hiding-places; and then you perceive that love was always there, and there in strength too, though it was not always on your lip, nor even in your thought.

As Christians grow in grace, *prayer becomes more mighty.* If the Lord builds you up into true spiritual manhood, you will know how to wrestle. Why did not Jacob meet the angel the first time when he went to Bethel? He lay him down, and slept, and dreamed a dream. He was a spiritual babe, and a dream suited his capacity. But when he came back, a man who had grown by years of experience, then the angel of God came and wrestled with him. It is one part of the teaching of divine experience that we grow stronger in the art of prayer, and know how to win from God greater things than at the first we ever dreamt of asking. God grant you better things in the matter of prayer than at your beginnings!

So, I think, it is in *usefulness.* Growing Christians, and full-grown Christians, are more useful than beginners. They may not, apparently, be doing so much; but they are doing it better, and there is more result. Their fruit, if not quite so plentiful, is of better quality, and more mellow. If there be fewer fruits, they are larger each one, and each one of a finer flavour.

In fact, this one thing is clear of all believers who have grown in grace—that *the work of grace in them is nearer completion.* They are getting nearer heaven, and they are getting more fit for it. Some of you are sitting very loose by this world. You are expecting very soon to hear the summons which will call you to quit these earthborn things. As ripe fruit comes from the tree with a gentle touch, so is it getting to be with you: the world had a greater hold upon you when you were young than it has now; and your thoughts of departure from it are more frequent, and more full of desire than they used to be. You have come to look at death as though it were only a removal to a neighbouring town, or like stepping across the street. You have looked at it so long that you can say like one I knew, "I have dipped my foot in the river every morning, and I shall not be at all afraid to ford it when the time comes." The Lord has made you to stand on tiptoe, ready to rise. You can say, "The time of my departure is at hand." Your chariot is at the door. Well, now, this is something better than your beginnings.

The old Christian may look back upon the new wine, and say regretfully, "How it sparkled and effervesced! But the old is better." You may think of the days of your youthful vigour when the body kept pace with the spirit; and you were young and full of nerve, and muscle, and enthusiasm. Those animal spirits have now gone from you, and you are sobered, and even slow. You have become old, and, perhaps, forgetful of many things. You go over the old story now instead of inventing new ones; but then, the old story—the old, old story—is as new to you as at the first, and you love it better than ever before. You cannot be driven from it now. I should think Satan himself would hardly like to meddle with some of you; he feels that he cannot shake your faith in the living God; or if he should shake

you, you would in turn shake *him*. He has had so many brushes with you during the last fifty years that he begins to know that you carry the true Jerusalem blade, and he had rather deal with other folks who are fond of the "modern thought" wooden sword. You have come to the land Beulah, and you are sitting on the brink of Jordan, waiting to cross over to the Celestial City. Surely, you have realized that God is dealing better with you than at your beginnings.

III. I will end with the last, which is a practical matter. How can we, dear friends, we who are beginning a Christian life, How can we secure that it will be better with us by-and-by than it is now? Alas! we have seen some start splendidly in appearance. They did run well; but they were soon out of breath, or turned aside. We hear no more of them. Our fear should be lest the like should happen to us. How can we act so as to hold on our way, and go from good to better?

I answer, first, *keep to the simplicity of your first faith*. Never get away from that. You remember the story we used to tell of poor Jack the huckster, who sang—

> "I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all,
> But Jesus Christ is my all in all."

Questioners could not make him doubt. He said that he could not doubt that he was a poor sinner and nothing at all, for he knew he was. And why should he doubt that Jesus Christ was his all in all? The Word of God said so; why should he doubt it? Here he stood, and would not budge an inch. Neither will I. The cony is safe in the rock, and he knows better than to come out. I hide in Jesus, and there I mean to remain, whatever the critics or the cultured may say. Jesus is my all in all, and I am nobody. My life cost him his death, and his death is my life. He took my sin, and died; I take his righteousness, and live. You may laugh, but I win. You may sneer, but I sing. O dear friend, fly to Jesus, and hide in him, and then keep there! Never get an inch beyond the cross; for, if you do, you will have to come back. That is your place till you die: you nothing, and Christ everything. You have to sink lower, and lower, and lower; and in your esteem Christ must rise higher, and higher, and higher. The "nothing at all" must be more emphatic the older you grow, and the "all in all" must be more emphatic too. If you get borrowing wings, and trying to fly up with speculations about what you may be in yourself, you will end in coming down heavily, with a bruised heart, if not with broken bones. Keep you at the foot of the cross, and you will maintain—nay, you will increase—your joy in the Lord.

At the same time, dear friends, *practise great watchfulness*. Many a child of God has to weep for months because he did not watch for minutes. He closed his eye a little while, and said, "It is all right with me"; and in that little while the enemy came and sowed tares among his wheat, and great mischief came of a little nap. We ought to have the eyes of a lynx, and they ought never to be closed. We know not which way the next temptation will come. We need to be guarded on all sides, and remember the words of our Master, "What

I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." You will not keep your joy and grow in grace unless you watch.

The next advice is *grow in dependence upon God.* For your watchfulness, depend upon his watching. You cannot keep yourself unless he keeps you. You must watch, but still it is he that keepeth Israel, and doth neither slumber nor sleep. Remember that.

Determine, dear friend, at the very beginning, *to be thorough.* I love to see young Christians very scrupulous about the mind of the Lord. I would not have you say, "Oh, that is non-essential!" Obedience to a command may not be essential to your salvation, but it must be essential to the completeness of your holiness. "Whatsoever he saith unto you do it." Safe walking can only come of careful walking. I have known the time when I felt afraid to put down one foot before the other for fear I should go wrong; and I believe I was never so right as when that feeling was on me continually. You young people must cultivate more and more the grace of holy fear. Daily dread lest in anything you should omit to do your Lord's will, or should trespass against him. In this way your joy shall be maintained, and you shall be settled after your old estates; and God will do better unto you than at your beginnings.

Lastly, *seek for more instruction.* Try to grow in the knowledge of God, that your joy may be full. It will be ill for you to say, "I know I was converted, and therefore need not care any further." That will not do. No, no, in conversion you began a race from which you are never to cease. You have been born again, and therefore you need spiritual food. You enjoy spiritual life, and you are to nurture that life till it is conformed to the perfect image of Christ. Onward, brother! Onward, for that which is beyond will repay your labour!

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
Ezekiel xxxvi. 1—15; 23—34.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—675, 889, 867.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—In the present epidemic we are, most of us, fellow-sufferers; let us endeavour to be spiritually profited thereby. We would be speedily restored; but we would also be graciously instructed. The comfort and joy of life are dependent upon the divine will as much as life itself. We must look up to the Lord for the joy of our graces as well as for the existence of our hope. In all things we must pray. The preacher begs that he may not be forgotten by his hearers and readers, to whom he hopes speedily to return in renewed health.

Yours most heartily,

Mentone. Jan. 11, 1890. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SOMETHING DONE FOR JESUS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 26TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"She hath wrought a good work upon me."—Matthew xxvi. 10.

STUDY carefully the story of the enthusiastic Christian woman who poured the alabaster box of very precious ointment upon the head of our ever-blessed Lord and Saviour. Honoured as that action is by the universal church of God, it did not escape criticism among the religious people of her own day. The disciples censured her, but Christ defended her; and in the course of his vindication of her he said, "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me." There is no reason for troubling gracious men and women; and specially no cause for so doing when their work is good, and is done for their Lord. Yet are there plenty of troublers around us to this day, and we could spare a few of them from our own immediate neighbourhood. They are only able to worry us so far as we think of them, and therefore we will let the wasps alone, and feed upon the honey which flowed from the lips of our Lord Jesus.

Observe that this woman had wrought a good work—good in intent, and good in itself. Her Lord said so, and his verdict ends all debate.

Observe specially that *her good work was a good work upon the Lord Jesus.* It was of no immediate benefit to anybody else, nor was it meant to be. "This ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor." So Judas and the other disciples said. The five hundred pence which it would have produced might have been spent in bread, and so have fed many poor people; but she expended it on Jesus, and meant that it should all be used in his honour, and that only. Poor or no poor, she thought only of him. The ointment might have been used for certain purposes at festivals or otherwise, and so have been more or less beneficial to a number of persons; but on this occasion the benefit was to the Lord alone, and she meant it so to be. On this account the practical, philanthropical people called it "waste." Is anything wasted which is all for Jesus? It might rather seem as if all would be wasted which was not given

to him. This box of precious ointment was all for him. Other persons in the room might smell the sweet perfume, but that was not what the grateful woman aimed at; she intended all the sweetness for Jesus: it was a good work wrought *upon him*. The woman's thought was that she would honour the Lord; her only intent was to show her reverence for him; and provided he should be pleased with her deed, she would be perfectly content, though no one else might be gratified. Her first and last thoughts were for the Lord Jesus himself.

We know from another evangelist that she *broke* the alabaster box. Was there need for that? Not in order that the ointment might be poured forth. She might, we should suppose, have opened the box in a less hasty manner; but the manner of a gift has frequently as much in it as the matter of a gift. She broke the box to display her eagerness, and to show that the choicest thing she had was not good enough for Jesus. She banished every notion of economy when she thought of her Lord. If she had possessed ten thousand times as much, she would have given it all to him, and have poured it out without stint. She did not count her offering a lavish expenditure: she would have made it lavish if it had been in her power. She would have no saving of pots and calculating of pennyworths when he was in the case: there should be no trace of niggard carefulness in her homage to her Lord. It was, therefore, as needful that she should break the box as that she should pour out the ointment; for she wanted to show that she loved her Saviour immeasurably; and she wished to express to him, as best she could, her intense veneration of him, and her ardent affection for him. Had some of us been there, we might have called it eccentricity, or fanaticism, or precipitancy, or waste; but she did not consider what onlookers might have to say: her only consideration was what Jesus might think. To please him was the height and range of her ambition. Happy woman, to have reached this gracious absorption!

The good work which she performed was, far beyond her own thought, a most appropriate one. Love is ever wise. Jesus was a King. He had ridden through the streets of Jerusalem in triumph. The multitude had strewn the branches in the way; they had saluted him with hosannas; they had done much by way of coronation; but they had not anointed him. Why this omission? She will anoint him if no one else will. Her hands shall bring out the perfumed nard, and pour the precious unguent upon the King of Israel. He was a priest, too, and, specially, a pardoning priest to her. She recognized his sacred priesthood; but the oil that fell on Aaron's head had never, literally, fallen upon the head of Jesus, and therefore she must needs anoint him plenteously, till the oil not only ran to the skirts of his garment, but filled all the house where they were sitting. As King and as Priest, she will take care that he is not without a costly anointing. Moreover, it was customary to anoint pilgrims for their refreshment at the end of a long journey, when they came into the house. The host on this occasion had neglected this act of courtesy. It was most suitable that when this great Lord of pilgrims, whose path had been weary and woful, had, at length, nearly ended his years of travel in this thorny wilderness, he should receive refreshment from

the woman's hospitable hand. Weary and worn was he, and she would fain anoint him with the oil of gladness. Though others had rejected him, she anointed his head, and owned the wayworn traveller as the noblest guest earth ever entertained. In all this her good deed was fit and seasonable. Say you not so?

Our Lord said, and here I am free from all charge of following my fancy, and am sure to be correct, that there was another meaning more remarkable by far. Whether this woman, with some prophetic spirit resting upon her, saw further into our Lord's words than his disciples did, we do not know; but Jesus declared that she did it for his burial—as it were, embalming him a little before the time for his closely-approaching sojourn in the tomb. There was a great appropriateness, then, in the act; and, we think, more appropriateness than she herself knew of at the time she did it; but it is ever so with loving hearts, reason does not guide them, but by a kind of holy instinct they hit upon the right thing. Where reason laboriously finds out wisdom, love discovers it at once. There are instincts of pure hearts that are more to be trusted than the conclusions of argumentative minds. The safest logic is often that of the heart, when at once it devises liberal things for Jesus. Mind you never set that logic aside. Here love devised the very deed that was required —the fittest action that could have been imagined under the sad circumstances so near at hand.

To come back to the point, however, which the woman was aiming at, she did all this, appropriate or not, *to Jesus*. It was a good work; but the point of it was that *it was a good work wrought on him*.

On this occasion I wish to speak of good works wrought on Jesus, and therefore I shall not be speaking to you all. Many of you are incapable of working a good work for Christ; for you are not saved yet. How can an evil tree bring forth good fruit? How can those who do not believe in Jesus do anything for him? It is not yet time for you to do anything for him. Your first business is that he should do everything for you. You must go to him as guilty sinners, and find mercy in him. I speak at this time only to those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus, and so have been set apart by him, and sanctified for ever by his one sacrifice. These, owing as they do, so much to their Lord, are those to whom I would speak now, and say, Render unto him good works that shall terminate in him, and shall be made to express your love to him.

Good works wrought upon Jesus, or solely in reference to him, are to be our subject. Very briefly *we shall notice the feelings prompting this kind of service;* secondly, *we shall mention modes of such service;* thirdly, *we shall give counsels, or careful notes to be observed in such service;* and then *we shall conclude with a word by way of defence of service of this sort.*

I. And, first, THERE ARE FEELINGS WHICH PROMPT TRUE BELIEVERS TO DO WORKS AS UNTO CHRIST. To bring forth these peculiar services, certain feelings move within the believer's bosom.

The first, and the most powerful, probably, is *gratitude*. "We love him, because he first loved us." He lived for us; he died for us; he rose for us; he pleads for us. We owe all to him. The natural impulse of the renewed heart is to say, "What can I do *for him?* I

love his people, but I love *him* best. I love his ministers, but *he* is beyond them all. I love his cause in the earth; but I love himself better. While I owe much to his church and to his ministers, I owe most to him. I want to tell him how I love him; I want to show him, by some direct act done for him, that my heart adores him for all that he has done for me." Beloved brethren and sisters, have you never felt in that way? I have often felt, even towards a kind earthly friend, that while I have been thankful for his gift, and for his help rendered, I have longed also to do something for the person helping me. When I have not known the person who helped me in my good work, I have wanted to know him; not from curiosity, but that I might say how grateful I felt to the bestower of such kindness. How often I have had my hand grasped by loving persons who have said, "I wanted to tell you that you led me to the Saviour!" They wanted to say it *to me;* and often have they written to me, and cheered my heart, because they felt a personal gratitude which wanted a personal expression. A poor woman once forced me with tears to receive a small sum of money for myself. I declined it till I saw that it would hurt her feelings, for she had evidently longed for this opportunity for expressing her thankfulness for the sermons she had read. If we feel thus towards an earthly friend, how much more shall we feel it towards him who has saved us by his blood! Do you not want to behold him, that you may tell him how you love him? Do you not feel prompted to devise some new method by which your love can manifest itself before the Beloved's eyes, not in word only, but in deed and in truth.

Another feeling that will prompt us to the same course is that of *deep veneration.* One has admired the personal character of Jesus with a sacred admiration, thinking of him as the Son of man in perfection, and then as God over all, blessed for ever. We have first fallen at his feet in humble worship, and then, when we have risen, we have said to our altogether-lovely Lord, "Oh, that I could serve such a One as thou art! Show me what thou wouldst have me to do. Only do me the honour to allot me a service which I may render unto thee; for he is more than a king who is honoured to be the lowest menial in thy court. He who reigns over nations is not so happy as the man who is subject to thy rule. It is a delight to pay thee homage." It is our heaven to think that we may be permitted to serve such a Christ, and to work a good work upon him.

Then, oftentimes, the feeling of *sympathy* will come in, and blend itself with veneration. Such sympathy is by no means to be condemned, but to be commended. I mean by sympathy this: have you not felt, when you have heard of our Redeemer's sufferings and death, that he deserved a great reward for them? Have you not wished that you could put a crown upon his head for having so disinterestedly laid down his life for his enemies? We have sometimes sung in this house with all our hearts those words—

> "Let him be crowned with majesty
> Who bowed his head to death;
> And be his honour sounded high
> By all things that have breath."

We have said in our hearts, How can we fitly honour this paragon of perfection, this mirror of unbounded love? Such a One as he is, having suffered so deeply, ought to be rewarded plenteously with the honour of all who can appreciate a great and noble deed.

That feeling of sympathy has been intensified when we have seen that, instead of honour, our Lord Jesus Christ receives coldness from the sons of men; nay, worse than that, is persecuted by their blasphemy, hounded by their hatred. Have you not felt, when you have heard his holy name blasphemed, as if you would blot that blasphemy out with your blood if you could? When you have seen his sacred day dishonoured, and the truths of the gospel denied, has not your soul burned within you? Have you not said, "What shall I do for this despised Saviour—maltreated by those whom he has blessed; and crucified afresh, and put to an open shame, even by these who profess to be his disciples? Traduced by those who call themselves his ministers? O Master, might I but do somewhat to wipe out these blots—to remove these slurs upon thy sacred name!" That feeling of sympathy with Jesus, working with veneration, backed with gratitude, will lead us to attempt brave deeds of love for him—for him personally, I mean.

In the midst of all this, as a central flame burning like the sun in the centre of the lesser lights, *our affection for Jesus* will make us long to serve him. We love our dear ones upon earth, but we love Jesus better than all of them put together. We love our brethren for Jesus' sake, but he is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely. We could not live without him. To enjoy his company is bliss to us: for him to hide his face from us is our midnight of sorrow. In comparison with that, all other sorrows are but the shades of grief, but his departure would be the substance of distress. And, Master, when we have looked at thee, and seen the nail-prints, and beheld the scar in thy side; when we have beheld thee standing before thy Father's throne still pleading for us, and revealing thine undying affection towards us, thy chosen, in thine intercession for us, we have said, "We must serve him. We must find out some way by which we may give him new honour." Oh, that I had a crown to cast at his feet! Oh, that I could make new songs to be sung before him! Oh, that I could write fresh music for angelic harps! Oh, for the power to live, to die, to labour, to suffer as unto him, and unto him alone! You know better than I can tell you, many of you, what these aspirations are. I am merely traversing a road with which you are continually familiar. Let us keep company in thought; and may I beg that, on some sunny day, when my Lord gives me special work to do for him, you will be at my side with your gifts and efforts of love for his dear name?

II. I shall pass on, in the next place, to notice THE MODES IN WHICH THIS SUGGESTED SERVICE OF GOOD WORKS DONE UNTO HIM MAY SHOW ITSELF. Holy Spirit, help me! We will begin, as it were, at the base of the pyramid, and go upward; and we may commence by saying that *the entire life of the Christian* ought to be, in many respects, a good work done unto Christ. Albeit that there must be in our life an eye to the good of our fellow-men, yet may we do it all unto the

Lord. The same law which saith, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength," adds, "and thy neighbour as thyself," which proves that it does not necessarily take away any part of our love from God when we act in love to our fellow-men. The duties of life, though they are to be done with a view to our neighbour as God's will requires, still ought, in the highest sense, to be performed mainly with an eye to the glory of Christ, and out of love to him. The servant is bidden to work, "as unto the Lord, and not unto men." The master, also, ought to discharge his duties knowing that he has a Master in heaven; and the thought of that Master above should guide him in all he does. O Christian men and women, whatever your calling, discharge the duties of it with a view to glorifying him, whose name, as Christians, you bear! So let it be in every relation of life. Should not the child seek to honour Christ by being like the holy child Jesus? Should not the parent devote his child to Christ, earnestly praying that he may grow up in the fear of the Lord, and may serve the Lord? Every lawful relationship can be consecrated. In every condition of life we can glorify Jesus.

In all the moral obligations of life, Jesus should be before us. We should be honest, not only for our reputation's sake, for that would be an unworthy motive, but for Christ's sake. Would we have Christ's disciples called "thieves"? We should be sternly upright, never by any means under suspicion of untruth or double-dealing, because we serve the Lord Christ, who is faithful and true. Of us more is expected than of others, since we serve a better Master than all others. God has done more for us; we have a clearer interest in the precious blood of Jesus, and therefore the common virtues of life ought to be exhibited in us to their fullest extent by the help of the Holy Spirit: so shall we do everything as unto the Lord Jesus.

Certain matters ordinarily overlooked in common life, the Christian must look to for Christ's sake. For instance, that of forgiveness of injuries. Some will not forgive at all: this is fatal to all hope of salvation. Others will forgive, but not till after some considerable time of wrath: good delayed is evil indulged. But you Christian, you are to do a good work upon Christ by forgiving for his sake. He has forgiven you, and therefore you will forgive others freely, and continually. Your revenge is the noble vengeance of heaping coals of the fire of kindness upon your enemy's head. You might have smitten him, but for Christ's sake you bless him. No words of wrath shall defile your lips, for love commands silence within those gates of coral. You see Christ, as it were, covering your foe with his own merit, and you say, "For his sake I forgive you." May your whole life, then, ordinarily, be lived as unto Jesus: and may special gems of forgiveness glisten in it!

Now go a step higher. *That which is purely Christian work ought to be done also upon him, and for him.* I mean by Christian work evangelical service which grows out of the plan of salvation. I refer to those things peculiar to Christians—such as spreading the gospel, teaching, instructing, consoling, almsgiving, and the like. All this should be done for Jesus more really than it often is. And that

other part of Christian service, namely, endurance, the bearing of shame for Christ's sake, the patient suffering of the will of God in providence—all this should be done for Christ most distinctly. I know there will be a second motive here, as in the former, and properly so. When I preach, I have an earnest desire to do good to my hearers: I ought to have such a desire. But yet, I desire to be moved by a higher motive than love to your souls: I desire that, by the stirring up of your minds, Christ may get glory; that you may be led to do something for him which will bring *him* honour, and please *him*. May you as saints be prospered, that the Lord of saints may be honoured! I look through you to Jesus. We ought to go to our Sunday-school class with the view of doing good to the children; yet above that object must rise the diviner object, namely, the honouring of Christ through those children. We seek the good of the children for Christ's sake. Visit the sick, or preach in the street, or distribute your tracts; dear brethren and sisters, in doing these things you do well; but do not forget to perform these acts as unto the Lord, or else you will miss the flower and crown of your service. I am sure it will be sweeter to do your work, and easier to do it—at the same time, it will be better for your own souls, and you may more surely expect the divine blessing if you do all for Jesus' sake.

And the same with the other branch of Christian service, namely, endurance: let us take up our cross because it is *his* cross, and we bear it after him. Oh, to lie still, and suffer without a murmur! Oh, to be silent under the shears, because our own blessed Lord was like a sheep before her shearers, and opened not his mouth! Oh, to be able to bear sarcasm, ridicule, misrepresentation, and even actual loss of this world's goods, for the sake of Jesus, and to bear them meekly, and even joyfully, because it comes for his sake! To bear suffering for Jesus would be a novelty to some Christians; but to the true believer it is an exquisite delicacy. To suffer distinctly for Jesus is to work a work on his most blessed self. I place this on a higher range than the last set of duties which I mentioned; but still, we have not yet come to the purest form of good works wrought upon the person of our Lord Jesus.

We will go a step higher. *There are works of the consecration of our substance.* In these all Christians ought to abound. It is ours to give often, give largely, give even till we feel the pinch of giving. But we must take care that we truly give as to the Lord. When you give your money to the church of God to maintain the preaching of the gospel, or to assist missionary enterprise, or whatever else the church has in hand, you are doing a good work to others; you are helping on the gospel which has been a blessing to you, and will be a blessing to them. But, over and above that, your desire should be to do it as unto the Lord. In giving what we can of our substance it is sweet to lay it at his feet—not regarding it so much as going into the treasury of the church, as going into the hand of the crucified Saviour. We give for his sake who gave himself for us. We long that his kingdom may come, and that he may see of the travail of his soul.

The same should be true of what is bestowed upon the poor. When

you noiselessly and quietly give to the poor, who need your help, you are doing it for Christ—if such, indeed, be your motive; and it ought always to be so. We are getting still nearer to the point when we give to the Lord's poor because the poor saints are in living union with Jesus; they are a part of Christ's body, and in giving to them, we are giving to Christ Jesus himself. When we feed, and clothe, and cherish poor aged believers because they belong to Christ, we are getting very near to that state of mind in which this good woman was when she wrought the good work upon Christ. I suppose the day will come in this age of novel reforms when we must not dare to help the poor and needy. We can hardly do so now without coming under the censure of the school of hard economists. I see notices in the windows requesting us by no means to give alms. I should like to put at the bottom of such placards the text of Scripture which commands us to give to him that asketh of us. Law or no law, I trust, when a Christian sees a case of necessity, he will not be held back by any motives of political economy, or any of the hard and fast teachings of the social scientists. But in your almsgivings see to it that, while ye do good unto all men, ye do it specially unto the household of faith.

"Oh," cries one, "you may very soon be found helping a person that does not deserve it." No doubt of it; but you had a great deal better do that than neglect those who should have your aid. If we give as unto the Lord, because he bids us do it, and for his sake, if any put our charity to an evil use, the sin will lie with them, and not with us. If in any cases applicants have deceived us, yet our act of charity is acceptable to God.

Never give for the sake of being thought generous; that spoils all: it is not giving, but buying a certain amount of respect at so much a pound. Never contribute to church-work, nor to the help of the poor, merely to gratify the instinct within you which finds it hard to say "No"; but do it because, if Christ asked you, you would give him anything, and you feel that when his poor have need you are bound to help them for his sake.

We will go a step higher, dear brethren. There are two great duties which the Lord has appointed for his people only, and these we should observe because they are appointed by him. I refer to *the two commands regarding Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.* In keeping these commandments there is a great reward to our own souls, but we ought to come *as believers* to be baptized out of love to Jesus. We ought not to ask, "What is the good of this?" We may not say, "Shall I get anything by it?" But we are to say simply this, "He bade me, and I will do it for the love I bear his name." I feel shocked when I hear people say, "But it is not essential to salvation." Thou mean and beggarly spirit! Wilt thou do nothing but what is essential to thine own salvation? A pharisee or a harlot might talk so. Is this thy love to Christ—that thou wilt not obey him, unless he shall pay thee for it? unless he shall make thy soul's salvation depend upon it? Oh, if you love the Master, the least of his commandments will seem very precious in your sight, and you will feel that, because you love him, you obey him! If obedience to an

ordinance should bring you no good whatever, if Jesus bade you, it is enough for you, whatever it may be. Indeed, it is all the sweeter to do the Lord's bidding when no trace of personal gain can be found mingling with the motive.

So, too, when we approach the table of communion, we shall get a blessing there if we come aright; but I think we too often fail to remember that we should sit at the holy table with the sole view of honouring the Lord who in that festival is remembered. He says that we are to show his death until he come. It is to him that the feast is dedicated. To keep up the memory of his death, and to testify the fact to others, we eat of the bread and drink of the cup. We celebrate the sacred supper for our Lord's sake; not because of church-rule, nor because it is the custom of the brotherhood so to do, nor even because it is a hallowed refreshment to our own hearts; but we commune at the sacred feast out of love to the Well-beloved.

But I will come to the point by saying, dear brothers and sisters, seek to do something for Jesus which shall even be above all this a secret sacrifice of pure love to Jesus. *Do special and private work towards your Lord.* Between you and your Lord let there be secret love-tokens. You will say to me, "What shall I do?" I decline to answer. I am not to be a judge for you; especially as to a private deed of love. The good woman in our text did not say to Peter, "What shall I give?" nor to John, "What shall I do?" but her heart was inventive. I will only say, that *we might offer more private prayer for the Lord Jesus.* "Prayer also shall be made for him continually." Intercede for your neighbours; pray for yourselves; but could you not set apart a little time each day in which prayer should be all for Jesus. Could you not at such seasons cry with sacret pleadings, "Hallowed be thy name! Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven?" Would it not be a sweet thing to feel at such a time—I shall now go up to my chamber, and give my Lord a few minutes of my heart's warmest prayer, that he may see of the travail of his soul?

That is one thing which all saints can attend to. Another holy offering is adoration—*the adoring of Jesus.* Do we not too often forget this adoration in our assemblies, or thrust it into a corner? The best part of all our public engagements is the worship—the direct worship; and in this the first place should be given to the worship of the Lord Jesus. We sing at times to edify one another with psalms and hymns, but we should also sing simply and only to glorify Jesus. We are to do this in company; but should we not do it alone also? Ought we not all, if we can, to find a season in which we shall spend the time, not in seeking the good of our fellow-men, not in seeking our own good, but in adoring Jesus, blessing him, magnifying him, praising him, pouring forth our heart's love towards him, and presenting our soul's reverence and penitence. I suggest this to you: I cannot teach you how to do it. God's Holy Spirit must show your hearts the way. But let me entreat you to believe that it will be no wasted thing if on him the good work of prayer and adoration shall begin, and on him it shall terminate. It will be a right thing and well done of you, if the Lord Jesus has for himself the choicest of your

thoughts, emotions, words, and deeds. Oh, that all that we have could be laid at his feet! It would be no waste, but the proper use of all our good things.

III. But time fails me, and therefore I must, thirdly, and with extreme brevity, OFFER YOU A COUNSEL OR TWO ABOUT DOING GOOD WORKS FOR JESUS. *Take care that self never creeps in.* It is to be all for Jesus: let not the foul fingers of self-seeking stain your work. Never do anything for Jesus out of love for popularity. Be always glad if your right hand does not know what your left hand does. Hide your works as much as possible from the praise of the most judicious friend. At the same time, let me also add, never have any fear of censure from those who know not your love to Jesus. This good woman did her work publicly, because it was the best way to honour her Lord; and if you can honour him by doing a good work in the market-place before all men, do not be afraid. To some, the temptation may be to court the public eye; to others, the temptation may be to dread it. Serve your Lord as if no eye beheld you; but do not blush though all the eyes in the universe should gaze upon you. Let not self, in either case, come in to defile the service.

Never congratulate yourself after you have wrought a work for Jesus. If you say unto yourself, "Well done!" you have sacrificed unto yourself. Always feel that if you had done all as it should be done, it would still be but your reasonable service.

Remember that *deeds of self-sacrifice* are most acceptable to Jesus. He loves his people's gifts when they give, and feel that they have given. Oftentimes we are to measure what we do for him, not by what we have given, but by what we have left; and if we have much left we have not given as much as that widow who gave two mites—nay, for certain we have not, for she gave "all her living."

Let us, above all, keep out of our heart the thought which is so common in this general life, that nothing is worth doing unless something practical comes out of it—meaning by "practical" some manifest result upon the morals or temporals of others. It is almost universal to ask the question, *Cui bono?*—"What is the good of it? What good will it do to me? What good will it do to my neighbour? To what purpose is this waste?" Nay, but if it will glorify Christ, do it; and accept that motive as the highest and most conclusive of reasons.

If a deed done for Christ should bring you into disesteem, and threaten to deprive you of usefulness, do it none the less. I count my own character, popularity, and usefulness to be as the small dust of the balance compared with fidelity to the Lord Jesus. It is the devil's logic which says, "You see I cannot come out and avow the truth, because I have a sphere of usefulness which I hold by temporizing with what I fear may be false." O sirs, what have we to do with consequences? Let the heavens fall, but let the good man be obedient to his Master, and loyal to his truth. O man of God, be just, and fear not! The consequences are with God, and not with thee. If thou hast done a good work unto Christ, though it should seem to thy poor bleared eyes as if great evil has come of it, yet hast thou done it, Christ has accepted it, and he will note it down, and in thy conscience he will smile thee his approval.

IV. I will not detain you longer, but just close by saying, that THERE IS A GOOD DEFENCE FOR ANY KIND OF WORK WHICH YOU MAY DO UNTO JESUS, AND UNTO JESUS ONLY. However large the cost, nothing is wasted which is expended upon the Lord, for Jesus deserves it. What if it did no service to any other; did it please *him?* He has a right to it. Is nothing to be done for the Master of the feast? Are we to be so looking after the sheep as never to do honour to the Shepherd? Are the servants to be cared for, and may we do nothing for the Well-beloved Lord himself? I have sometimes felt in my soul the wish that I had none to serve but my Lord. When I have tried to do my best to serve God, and a cool-blooded critic has pulled my work to pieces, I have thought, "I did not do it for you! I would not have done it for you! I did it for my Lord. Your judgment is a small matter. You condemn my zeal for truth. You condemn what he commends." Thus may you go about your service, my brother, and feel, "I do it for Christ, and I believe that Christ accepts my service, and I am well content." Jesus deserves that there should be much done altogether for him. Do you doubt it? There is brought into the house, on his birthday, a present for father. That present is of no use to mother, or to the children; it cannot be eaten, it cannot be worn; father could not give it away to anybody, it is of no value to anybody but himself. Does anybody say, "What a pity it was to select such a gift, even though father is pleased"? No, everybody says, "That is just the thing we like to give to father, since he must keep it for himself. We meant it to be for him; we had no thought of any second; and we are glad that he must use our gift for his own pleasure." So with regard to Jesus. Find out what will please him; and do it for him. Think of no one else in the matter. He deserves all you can do, and infinitely more.

Besides, you may depend upon it that any action which appears to you useless, if you do it prompted by love, has a place in Christ's plan, and will be turned to high account. This anointing of our Lord's head was said to be useless. "No," said Jesus, "it falls in just in its proper place—she has done it for my burial." There have been men who have done an heroic deed for Christ, and at the time they did it they might have asked, "How will this subserve my Lord's purpose?" But somehow it was the very thing that was wanted. When Whitefield and Wesley turned out into the fields to preach, it was thought to be a fanatical innovation, and perhaps they, themselves, would not have ventured upon it if there had not been an absolute necessity; but by what seemed to that age a daring deed they set the example to all England, and open-air preaching has become an accepted agency of large value. If you, for Christ's sake, become Quixotic, never mind; your folly may be the wisdom of ages to come.

Once again, the woman's loving act was not wasted; for it has helped us all down to this very moment. There has it stood in the Book; and all who have read it, and are right in heart, have been fired by it to sacred consecration out of love to Jesus. That woman has been a preacher to nineteen centuries; the influence of that alabaster box is not exhausted to-day, and never will be. Whenever you meet a

friend in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, who has done anything unto our Lord Jesus, you still smell the perfume of the sacred spikenard. Her consecrated act is doing all of us good at this hour: it is filling this house with fragrance. If you are serving Christ in your own secret way in which you do not so much seek to benefit others as to honour *him*, it may be you will be an instructive example to saints in ages to come. Oh, that I could stir some hearts here to a personal consecration to Jesus, my Lord! Young men, we want missionaries to go abroad; are none of you ready to go? Young women, we want those who will look after the sick in the lowest haunts of London; will none of you consecrate yourselves to Jesus, the Saviour?

I shook hands, after the sermon this morning, with a good missionary of Christ from Western Africa. He had been there sixteen years. I believe that they reckon four years to be the average of a missionary's life in that malarious region. He had buried twelve of his companions in the time. For twelve years he had scarcely seen the face of a white man. He was going to Africa to live a little while longer, perhaps, but he expected soon to die; and then he added (I thought sweetly) as I shook his hand, "Well, many of us may die: perhaps hundreds of us will do so; but Christ will win at the last! Africa will know and will fear our Lord Jesus; and what does it matter what becomes of us—our name, our reputation, our health, our life—if Jesus wins at the last?" What heroic words! What a missionary spirit! Live in that spirit, dear brethren and sisters, and in that spirit come now to the communion-table! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xxvi. 1—16.

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LOVE'S COMPETITION.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 2ND, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged."—Luke vii. 42, 43.

I REMEMBER seeing, somewhere or other, as a sign upon an inn, the words "The First and Last." I do not know what that may happen to be among men, but I know that love is God's first and last. It is there that he begins with us in mercy—"We love him, because he first loved us." His love at the first springs up like a fountain in the midst of a desert, and freely flows along the wilderness to the unworthy sons of men. In the end, the result of that love is that men love him: they cannot help it any more than the rock can prevent the echo when the voice falls upon it. Love is not a creature of law: it comes not on demand, it must be free or not at all. It has its reasons why it springs up in our hearts; but it is not a mercenary thing which can be procured at such and such a price. It is not a matter of argument: it is not to itself an act performed as a matter of duty. Love is a duty certainly, but it does not come to us that way: it comes to us like a roe or a young hart, over every mountain and hill, leaping and bounding; it comes not as a heavy burden dragged along an iron way. If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

Men do not make themselves love by a course of calculation; but they are overtaken with it, and carried away by its power. When godly men consider and enjoy the great love of God to them, they begin to love God in return; just as the bud, when it feels the sunshine, opens to it of its own accord. Love to God is a sort of natural consequence which follows from a sight and sense of the love of God to us. I think it is Aristotle who says that it is impossible for a person to know that he is loved without feeling some degree of love in return. I do not know how that may be, for I am no philosopher; but I am sure that it is so with those who taste of the love of God. As love is

the first blessing coming from God to us, so it is the last return from us to God: he comes to us loving, we go home to him loving.

I. I intend to keep to my text, and handle it red hot, by first noticing that IT IS TAKEN FOR GRANTED THAT PARDONED SINNERS WILL LOVE. "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" It is implied that the two debtors who had been frankly forgiven would both love their benefactor. The question was not "Which of them will love him?" but "Which of them will love him *most?*" So, then, I say, it is taken for granted in the text that those who are pardoned will love him who has so freely pardoned them.

And this, first, because *it seems most natural that where kindness is received gratitude should be felt.* This is so generally admitted that gratitude is found among the lowest and worst of mankind. "If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them." It is man-like to return good for good, and ingratitude is looked upon most rightly as one of the basest of the vices. Why, we find gratitude not only in men and women—intelligent creatures—but we find it in the very beasts of the field! "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." How a dog that has received benefits from you will be attached to you, and by every possible means will endeavour to show his affection! The ancients had many rare stories of the gratitude of wild beasts. You remember that of Androcles and the lion. The man was condemned to be torn to pieces by beasts; but a lion, to which he was cast, instead of devouring him, licked his feet, because at some former time Androcles had extracted a thorn from the grateful creature's foot. We have heard of an eagle that so loved a boy with whom he had played that, when the child was sick, the eagle sickened too; and when the child slept, this wild, strange bird of the air would sleep, but only then; for when the child awoke, the eagle awoke. When the child died, the bird died too. You remember that there is a picture in which Napoleon is represented as riding over the battle-field, and he stops his horse, as he sees a slain man with his favourite dog lying upon his bosom doing what he can to defend his poor dead master. Even the great man-slayer paused at such a sight. There is gratitude among the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air. And, surely, if we receive favours from God, and do not feel love to him in return, we are worse than brute beasts; and so the Lord, in that pathetic verse in Isaiah, pleads against us, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." If we receive favours from God, it is but natural that we should love him in return. Alas, that many should be so unnatural, so false to every noble instinct, so dead to the gratitude which goodness deserves!

But gratitude should surely arise when the benefit is surpassingly great. When favours are far above the common run of blessings—when these favours are not such as are confined to time and to the body, but when they reach to eternity and bless the soul; when favours are of such weight as the forgiveness of sin, the salvation of the soul from wrath to come; surely here love must spring up with the greatest force and freedom. I would stand and sing to the fountain of the

heart as Israel did in the wilderness, "Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: The princes digged the well." And has not our great Prince, who has been smitten upon the cheek, digged this well by giving us, through his free grace and dying love, to taste of full remission and of complete pardon of our guilt? Shall we not, must we not, love the Redeemer in return? To have sin forgiven and not to love God! I call common ingratitude worse than brutish; but in this case where shall I go for a word? I must call it devilish. It were worse than infernal to receive a deliverance from guilt so great, and from punishment so justly terrible, and not to love the Lord, through whom it is given to us. Oh, love the Lord, whose mercy endureth for ever! If, indeed, you have tasted of that mercy, you must love him. It cannot be otherwise—you are bound to God by bonds of love, and these draw you, by a secret but irresistible force, to love the Lord in return.

And moreover, not only is this natural and necessary, because of the greatness of the mercy, but *the grace of God always takes care that wherever pardon is given love shall be ensured;* for the Holy Spirit co-operates with the work of Christ, and if we are cleansed from the stain of our former evil through the blood of Christ, we are renewed and changed in the spirit of our minds by the Holy Spirit. He does not take away our sin, and then leave us that old heart of stone, insensible, ungrateful; but as he gives us a garment of righteousness he gives us a heart of flesh. The Spirit works in us a degree of love at the same time that he creates the first look of faith. Anon our faith increases by which we received remission, and then he works in us more and more that love to Christ by which we cling to him. This love works in us hatred of sin and a spirit of obedience, whereby we yield ourselves up to the service of him who has bought us with his precious blood. You know that it is so, brethren. Where pardon comes, delight in God comes with it. You know that God does not divide his gifts, and give justification to one and sanctification to another; but the covenant is one, and the blessings of the covenant are threaded on the one string of infinite wisdom, so that when there comes the washing in the blood, there comes also a cleansing with water by the Word. The Holy Spirit washes us from the power of sin, as the blood of Christ cleanses us from the guilt of sin. Where sin is forgiven, there must be love to the God who forgave it, because the Spirit of God makes sure work upon the heart of the believer, and one of his first works is love.

I need not argue this further, because all Christians know this as a matter of fact—*where there is no love there is no pardon.* You cannot be pardoned, and not love God as a result of his loving forgiveness. What was the very first emotion that you and I felt when we had a sense of guilt removed? We felt joy for our own sake; but immediately after, or at the same instant, we felt such intense gratitude to God that we loved him beyond all expression. We have sometimes been half afraid that we do not love God so much now as we did at that moment, though I trust that the fear is groundless. But at that moment there was nothing too hot or too heavy for us to have attempted on behalf of him who had taken the burden from off our shoulder. We would

have said at that moment, "Here am I; send me," if it had been to prison, or to death. Oh, the joy of those first days! They are rightly called the days of our espousals. And what love we had then! We were willing to leave all for Christ's sake. We snapped fond connections at his command. Truly, like Israel of old, we would have gone after our God into the wilderness—ay, after our Saviour into the grave. Nothing could have kept us back, or have caused us to wander from him then. Do you not remember how you used to long for Sabbath-days, to hear of Jesus, and praise his name with his people? If there was a week-night service, you were always there, though no one persuaded you to go. Then, any corner in the meeting-house was good enough for you. Now, perhaps, you want a very soft cushion to sit upon. You sat then in a straight-backed pew, and did not know it. Now, you want very tender dealing; and the preacher must mind that he interests you by illustrations and poetical allusions; but then the gospel itself interested you; and however dull the preacher might have been, you were so willing to hear about Jesus, and to know of his love, that there you were, eager to hear the humblest evangelist. Wisdom did not need to press you into her house, for you were earnestly waiting at the posts of her doors, glad to hear even the footfalls of those who came in and out. Oh, those were brave days! I hope that we have braver days now; but, for certain, as sure as we knew our pardon, we felt that we loved the Lord with all our hearts.

Now I want to make a little practical use of this inference from the text. That pardoned souls love their pardoning God is a great truth, and a very solemn one in its bearings upon us at this time, for there are persons in this house of prayer who were never forgiven; and we are sure of that unhappy fact, since they do not love God. Their sins must be still upon them, because they have not the token of pardon, inasmuch as they have no love to Jesus Christ our Lord.

Oh, listen to me, ye that do not love God, and yet, perhaps, dream that you are saved! Are there not some here that seldom *think of* God, who do not care if a day, a week, a month, a year, should pass over their heads, and yet they have no thought of the Almighty Judge of all the earth? They receive his mercies; but they do not thank him. They feel his power; but they do not fear him. "God is not in all their thoughts." O my hearer, if this be your case, you do not love him; for if we love any person, we are sure to think of him. Thoughts fly that way in which the heart moves. I do not say that we are always thinking of those we love; but I do say that our thoughts will fly that way when they can. You know at sunset where the crows live. Perhaps all day long you are unable to tell; for they may fly from one ploughed field to another to find their meat. But watch when night comes on, and when they are free from other obligations, and wish to find rest; they fly straight to those tall trees whereon they have built their nests. A man may, in the busy time of the day, think about fifty things; but let him be free from pressing labour and care, and he returns to his love as birds fly to their nests at night. His thought flies to Jesus, because Jesus is the home of his heart. If your hearts love God, your thoughts will run to him as the rivers

run to the sea. Yea, and often in the very middle of business, the man who loves his God will be speaking with him. He may not interrupt the conversation, and those in the shop may not know what is on his mind; but his heart will be up above the mountains, where the angels dwell, communing with the great Father of lights. But where there is no thought of God, there is no love to him.

Are there not many who never *do* anything for God? He has made them, and he preserves them, and yet they never make him any return by way of willing action designed to give him pleasure. I may put it to some of you—did you ever do anything distinctly for God in all your lives? What! Not so much as once? Ah, me! a man so curiously made by the divine finger, displaying infinite skill in every blood-vessel, and nerve, and muscle, that are necessary for his life and motion, and yet he has never thought of the Great One who has set all this machinery in motion, and keeps it in action! To live only by God, and yet to live without him! Strange! Can there exist a man who never does anything for his God, who is constantly doing so much for him? If so, I would say to such a one—You have never been pardoned; for you do not love God, since you never think of him, and you do nothing for him.

Some men evidently do not love God, for they have *no care* about anything that concerns him. They do not refrain from sin because sin would grieve God. The idea of grieving God, perhaps, has not crossed their minds; so they vex the Holy Spirit most thoughtlessly. But, ah! if you love anyone, you will not like to cause him grief: you will not do the evil thing which he hates. He that loves God will often have a check put upon him, and feel that he cannot do this great wickedness, and sin against God. To sin against God is the greatest of sin, and the essence of sin. The venom of sin lies there. This makes sin so exceeding sinful, that it is against the God of love. But if you never felt that, then you do not love him; and, for certain, you are not forgiven.

Look at others: they do not love God, for they do *not care for his house* where his people meet. They seldom come to the meeting for worship; and if they come, it is from some other motive than to meet with God. They do not care for *his day*. Sundays are very dreary in London, so they say. There is nothing to interest them, for they have no interest in the great Father, or his incarnate Son; they have no care to hear of him, or to praise him, or to pray to him. They do not care for *his Book*, though it is a world of delights and comforts. The Bible is perfumed with the love of God, but they perceive not its fragrance. The Saviour's face is to be seen reflected in almost every page, and yet some think that the Bible is more dull than an old almanack; and, though they must keep it in their house—for it is respectable to have a copy of it—yet to read it, and to read it with pleasure—why, that has never happened to them; nor is there any likelihood that it ever will unless they get made anew.

Nor do they care for *God's people*. In fact, they like a quiet joke against Christian people; and sometimes, if they can see faults in them—and, oh, how readily they may!—they report those faults with considerable exaggerations, and feel pleased to eat up the faults

of God's people as they eat bread! Want of love to the children argues want of love to their Father. "He that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him;" and we know that we love God when we love his children. But if in your heart there is no such love to his children, to his Book, to his day, to his house, or to his service, you may rest quite certain, my friend, that your guilt clings to you still. You are unpardoned, and God will require that which is past, and call you to account. For every secret thing he will bring you into judgment, and for every idle word that you have spoken he will take reckoning of you. Ah! how sad it is that when I am longing to speak joyously about the love that arises out of pardoned sin, I am compelled, for pity's sake, to turn aside to give a warning to many who, having no love to God, prove by that fact that they have never been forgiven!

So I leave the first point. It is supposed in the text, and taken for granted, that all pardoned sinners will love him who has pardoned them.

II. But now, secondly, IT IS SUGGESTED IN THE TEXT, THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENCES OF DEGREE IN THE MATTER OF LOVE TO GOD. "Tell me which of them will love him *most*." These words evidently show that some persons love God more than others, and that, albeit there must be a sincere love to God in all pardoned sinners, yet there is not the same degree of love. Love is evidently a grace which is not stereotyped, and cast in a mould, so as to be the same in every case, and at every time. *Love is a thing of life: it is, therefore, a thing of growth.* It is certainly so in our own selves. There was a time when we did not love God so much as we do now; and I grieve to say that there are even now times when we do not love God so much as we once did, for we grow cold and backsliding. Love is not like a piece of cast iron, fixed and set; but it grows, and has its times of budding, flowering, and leaf-shedding. It is like a fire; at one time it may burn low, and at another time it may be blown up to a very vehement heat. Love rises and falls: I speak not of God's love to us; but of our love to God. It has its ups and downs, its summers and its winters, its flood-tides and its ebbs; and if we find a change in love, in the same heart, we are not at all astonished that it should differ in different hearts.

Besides, we know that there are differences in love, because *there are differences in all the other graces.* Faith—some men have much faith. God be thanked that there are men of strong faith still on the face of the earth! But there are others who have a faith which, though a true faith, is a very weak one. It is a trembling faith. It cannot walk the waves with Peter, but it can sink with him, and it can cry out for deliverance. Faith, in some Christians, seems to be a very feeble affair. As I said the other day, they hardly know whether it is faith or unbelief. Their cry is, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," as if they had made a mistake in calling it faith at all, for it was so mixed with unbelief. It is not always such an infant grace, for there are strong believers, who have turned to flight the armies of the aliens —men who have borne their cross without impatience, and their testimony without cowardice: men who have conquered sin, and lived

in holiness, and brought glory to God. Faith, like a ladder, has its lower and its higher rounds. Faith has its dawning, its noon, its shade. We are sure that it is so, for we have observed it in ourselves, and seen it in others. We have seen it great, and we have seen it little.

The practical point I would reach is just this. *Let us look, first of all, to our love in its sincerity.* What if my love may not be compared with yours as to degree? Yet the Lord grant that I may truly love him. Peter could not say that he loved Christ more than others, but he did say, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." A little pearl is a pearl as much as a great one, though every one of us would sooner have the greater pearl. There is the Queen's image on a fourpenny piece as certainly as there is upon the sovereign: though we would all prefer the golden coin. There is the image of God on all his people's faith and love, whether great or little. The main thing with the coin is to be sure that it is genuine metal. So, if love be real love, that is the main point. Do you love the Lord with all your heart? If so, strive to have more love, but do not fling away what you have, for you would thus despise what the Spirit of God has wrought in you.

Endeavour also, dear friends, to have growing love. Do not be satisfied to be to-day what you were twelve months ago. I am afraid that some Christians do not grow much. I am very glad when I see them grow downward, when they are rooted in humility, when they have truer views of themselves than they ever yet had, and a deeper sense of their indebtedness to God. That is good growth. Try to have, however, a love that grows, so that you may more forcibly love Jesus Christ than you did in days that are past. Do say to yourself, "Well, if I have ever so little love, it shall be practical love, I will show it. I will be doing something for my Lord." The woman, by whose means this parable was called forth, loved Christ so that she brought her alabaster box of ointment, and anointed his feet, and washed them with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. And one of the best ways to make love grow is to use all the love you have. Is it not so with merchants and their money? If they want to increase their capital, they trade with it. If you want to increase your love to Jesus, use it. Do not merely talk about it, but actually serve him under its sweet constraint. It is a very poor Christianity that consists in sitting still and dreaming, and never attempting any practical service for Jesus, our Lord. He that thinks that he will quietly enjoy religion all alone, will soon find that he has very little of it to enjoy; for doubts and fears will breed in swarms in a stagnant atmosphere. Where there is none of the blessed wind of activity, there will soon be mists and damps—perhaps foul gas and fevers.

And if you have but little love at present, *cry to God to give you an intenser love;* and, though I have said that to use your love is a good way to increase it, yet there is something still better, and that is, to know more, and feel more of the love of Christ to you. If you take exercise, you will increase your sense of warmth; but it will be a far surer thing if you get where the sun shines with equatorial heat: so other means are good, but to get near to Jesus is best of all. In proportion as you live close to the glorious central sun of the love of

Christ, you will yourself be warm. I was about to compare the heart of my Lord to a volcanic mountain constantly streaming with the burning lava of love. Oh, that my soul could but get that fire-stream poured into it to set the whole of my nature on fire, and consume me in the flame-torrent of love!

You see that it is suggested in the text that there are differences in the degrees of love; and there let us leave it, for we must come to the third point.

III. Thirdly, THE TEXT PUTS TO US A QUESTION, "WHO WILL LOVE HIM MOST?"

I want to introduce the question to you by saying that it is *a very interesting one*. After what the Lord has done for us, one takes pleasure in thinking what will come of it. One likes to think of the farmer's harvest. After all that ploughing and sowing, what will come of it? It is interesting to begin to calculate the crop, and to anticipate the shouts of harvest-home. Now, what will come of infinite love, the supreme act of God's heart to men? What will come out of the gift of his Only-begotten Son, and the putting away of sin through the death of Jesus? What will men do for God after this? How much will they love him? It is an interesting question. What have you to say upon it?

And it is *a personal question*, which the Lord puts to each one of us. You know he put it to Simon. "Tell me," said he, "which of them will love him most?" And he puts it to us to consider it, to turn it over, and to give our own verdict; because there may be some blunder in our heart which this question is meant to set right; and the thoughts which the enquiry will cause in the spirit are meant to correct our judgments. Therefore do not put it aside, but try now to answer it as the Lord puts it.

It is *a practical question*—"Which of them will love him most?"—for everything in conduct depends upon love. Where there is much love, there is sure to be much service in proportion to the strength. Give us a church that loves Christ Jesus much. You will have mighty prayer-meetings; you will have a holy membership; you will have liberal giving to the cause of Christ; you will have hearty praising of his name; you will have careful walking before the world; you will have earnest endeavours for the conversion of sinners. Missions at home and abroad will be set on foot when love is fervent. When the heart is right, everything is likely to be right; but when the heart goes wrong, oh, what a fatal thing it is! A disease of the heart is looked upon as the worst of mischiefs that can happen to a man. One old doctor of my acquaintance used to say, "We can do nothing with the heart." God keep us from a diseased heart: a fatty degeneration of the heart, or an ossification of the heart towards the Lord Jesus Christ!

The question asked in the text is, however, *a somewhat limited one*. It is this. The question is not, who in all the world will love Christ most?—but who out of two persons, in whom there is no particular difference of character, but only this one difference—that the one owes five hundred pence, and the other fifty—which out of these two will love Christ most? We will suppose that they are equally tender of

heart, and equally regenerate; and that they do know, each of them, certainly, that his debt has been discharged. The only difference between them is that one has been a grosser sinner than the other; and the question asked is, "Which of those two will love the Saviour most?"

It is *a very simple question*, too, not at all hard to answer; for even this Simon, the Pharisee, who, like the rest of the Pharisees, was very badly instructed, yet, nevertheless, could see his way to answer the question correctly. So he answered, "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most;" and the Lord replied, "Thou hast rightly judged." Thus I have set before you the question.

IV. And so, lastly, IT IS EXPECTED THAT WE GIVE A REPLY; and I do wish for myself—and therefore wish the same for you—that each one of us may say, "I am the man that ought to love the Lord Jesus most; and by his grace I will surely do so."

The most indebted should love most. Have we not here many five-hundred-pence debtors? Some of my dear brethren here present were among outward sinners the very chief—men who could drink, and swear, and lie, ringleaders in everything that was evil. Blessed be God that such have been here led to Jesus! We heard the other night a dear brother tell us of what he used to be. With modesty and shamefacedness he mentioned how great his sin had been; but his sin was put away; he was pardoned, and he knew it, and rejoiced in it. Such a man must say, "I will love him most." Where there has been overt sin, palpable, undeniable—where the outward character has been defiled and stained with it, forgiveness involves us in deep obligation to grateful love. You may stand in the front rank, and love Jesus most.

But I am not going to let you rise to that eminence of obligation, or rather sink to that depth of indebtedness without having a struggle for it myself. Some of us take that place of eminent obligation on another ground, and yet it is the same ground; for while some of us never were openly profane, or drunken, or immoral, we have to confess the equal greatness of our sin on account of our offending against light and knowledge, against early convictions, against a holy training, against a tender conscience, against singular favours received from God; and therefore with shame we begin to take the lowest room, acknowledging that to us belongs the greatest debt of grateful praise to God. When I was preaching once I said—and I meant it—that I should be the deepest debtor to divine grace that ever entered the gates of glory, and I ventured to say—

> "Then loudest of the crowd I'll sing,
> While heaven's resounding mansions ring,
> With shouts of sovereign grace."

It was in a country place, and as I came down the pulpit stairs many clustered about me to shake hands, and one old lady said to me, "You made one great blunder in your sermon." I said, "My dear soul, I dare say I made a score. I am a great blunderer." "No," said she, "but you said that you would sing the loudest when you get to heaven; but you shall not, for I owe more to divine grace than

you possibly can do. I was once a great sinner, and I have had much forgiven, and therefore I shall praise God more than you." I did not yield the point, but I held my tongue. I could let her be first, and yet take the same place myself. As I went down the aisle many friends declared that they would not give way to me in that point, and that they ought to praise God more than I, for they owed him more. It was a happy controversy. It reminded me of Ralph Erskine's Contention among the Birds of Paradise, where he represents the saints in glory, each saying that he shall lie the lowest, and shall praise the most sweetly the infinite love of God. I think that there are grounds upon which some here, who have been kept from everything which is outwardly evil, may, nevertheless, feel that inwardly they are five hundred pence debtors; and so, when the question is asked, "Which will love him most?" they will say, "Why, I! I was not so honest as some of those wicked fellows, I did not dare to say all they said, nor to be openly vile as they were; but I was quite as bad at heart, and if I dare have had my full swing, I should have been as base as they were."

But I do not think that the spirit of the parable is exhausted by either of these cases. I think it includes more. There are some who evidently have not had more forgiven than others as to outward sin; on the contrary, they have been prudently brought up from their childhood, and yet for many a year they have been foremost in service, and have been special lovers of the Lord. Though by no means great offenders in their unconverted state, they are certainly great saints now; intense in their service, consistent in their character, fervent in their love. How is it that some who shout that they have been snatched from the burning, and according to their own statement were the very chief of sinners, and make a great trumpet-blowing over their own conversion, yet do not love the Lord Jesus one half so much as these dear, quiet souls who never went into open sin? I take it, the reason is this. Our estimate of sin is, after all, the thing which will create and inflame our love; for if a man thinks sin to be exceeding sinful, and feels it to be so, he *has a deeper sense of his indebtedness* than the man who may have committed grosser vices, but has never seen them in their real blackness, as they appear in the light of God's countenance. Too many believers know little of what it is to be amazed and astounded at the heinousness of their transgressions. Why, time was with me —and is now—when, if I had inadvertently spoken a word that was not exactly true, it cost me more pain to think of what was only a hasty error than it has cost many men to repent of their cursing and swearing. I am sorry to say it, but I believe that some make a glory of their shame, and dare to brag of what they used to be. They stand up and make confession without a tear in their eye, or a blush on their cheek. Such testimony ought never to be heard, for it is a positive creator of evil in the minds of those that hear it. I am sorry to have to say it; but I know that it is so. Testimonies are published which are provocatives to vice, and rather tend to make men immoral than to make them turn to God. In certain circles he is treated as a hero who can prove that he has been a great rascal. It was not thus that

the prodigal was received by his father: he never hung up his old rags as a trophy. O brethren, when we talk about what we were, we had better veil our faces. Our former follies are things to be confessed to God in secret; and if they must be spoken in public, to the praise of divine grace, there must be a careful avoidance of anything like boasting, for it is a shame even to speak of the things that were done of them in secret. When there is really a deep sense of sin, there is a holy, delicate way of speaking of it. Old sins are not to be talked of as an old soldier shoulders his crutch, and shows how fields were won. A crimson blush is the best colour to wear when we speak of our lost estate. To talk smilingly of injuries done to the delicacy of our own conscience, of awful injuries done to others by a foul example, is not to glorify God, but to enthrone vice.

And, dear friends, I believe that some, whom God has preserved by preventing grace from going into great sin, will, nevertheless, love him most because *they have a clearer view than others of what it cost in order that they might be pardoned.* Happy are they who remember well the griefs of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane

> "There's ne'er a gift his hand bestows
> But cost his heart a groan."

Oh, if your heart dwells on Calvary, where falls the crimson shower of Christ's most precious blood—if you gaze intently upon the wounds of Jesus till you die into the death of the Crucified, then do you love much. It is well to have the soul torn with anguish because

> "It cost HIM cries and tears
> To bring us near to God:
> Great was our debt, and he appears
> To make the payment good."

For, in proportion as you estimate the sacrifice, you will love him whose own self was the sacrifice for sin. Brethren, I hope you all love Christ Jesus more than I do; for I would have him possess the highest love of every human heart: and yet I will not be willingly excelled by any one of you in a competition of love to Jesus. I will run my very best that no man take my crown.

But supposing, dear friends, any of you do love him most, then *show it*, just as that woman did who brought the alabaster box of precious ointment. If you love him most, *do most.* Do everything that is possible to humanity, quickened by the Spirit of God. If you have done much, do ten times more. Never talk of what you have done, but go on to something else. An officer rode up to his general, and said, "Sir, we have taken two guns from the enemy." "It is well," said the general, "Take two more."

If you have most love to Christ, do most spiritual good to men. Yet *do somewhat distinctly for Jesus.* It is a blessed token for good when our work among men is not so much for the sake of sinners as for love of Jesus. When we love the brethren, it should be because they belong to Christ. It is sweet to serve the Lord Christ himself. See how the holy woman offered homage distinctly to her Lord: tears

for his travel-stains, hair to wipe his feet, ointment to anoint his flesh Do your choicest and best for Jesus, for Jesus personally.

Try to do it most humbly. Stand behind him. Do not ask anybody to look at you. Do it very quietly. Do it, feeling that it is a great honour to be permitted to do the least service for Jesus. Do not dream of saying, "I am somebody. I am doing great things. I do more even than Simon, the Pharisee. Come see my zeal for the Lord of hosts." Jehu talked in that fashion; but he was good for nothing. Do your personal part without seeking to be seen of men.

Do it self-sacrificingly. Bring your best ointment. Pinch yourself for Christ. Make sacrifices—go without this and that to have something wherewith you can do him honour.

Do it very penitently. When you serve him best, still let the tears fall on his feet, mingling with the costly ointment. The tears and the ointment go well together. Mourn your guilt, while you rejoice in his grace.

Do it continuously. "This woman," said Christ, "since I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet." Do not leave off loving him and serving him. Do it on, and on, and on, however much the flesh may ask for respite from service.

Do it enthusiastically. See how she kissed his feet; nothing less than this would express her love. Stoop down, and kiss and kiss again those blessed feet which travelled so far in love for you. Throw your whole soul into your deed of love. "Why," they will say, "Mrs. So-and-so is enthusiastic. She is quite carried away by her zeal." Let it be true, more and more. Never mind what the cold-hearted think, for they cannot understand you. They will say, "Ah! that young person is too fast by half." Never mind. Be faster still. Wise people cry out, "He has too many irons in the fire." But I say to you, blow up the fire; get all the irons red hot; and hammer away with all your might. With all your strength and energy plunge into the service of your Master. If you love your Master, you can best show your love by ardent service. The Lord bless you with the utmost degree of love, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xviii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—810, 814, 797.

Mr. SPURGEON'S return was deferred for one week by a severe attack of sciatica and gout, but he prays that he may preach at home February 2nd. Oh, for a great blessing!

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HEAVEN ABOVE, AND HEAVEN BELOW.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 2ND, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters."—Revelation vii. 16, 17.

"They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them."—Isaiah xlix. 10.

JORDAN is a very narrow stream. It made a sort of boundary for Canaan; but it hardly sufficed to divide it from the rest of the world, since a part of the possessions of Israel was on the eastern side of it. Those who saw the Red Sea divided, and all Israel marching through its depths, must have thought it a small thing for the Jordan to be dried up, and for the people to pass through it to Canaan. The greatest barrier between believers and heaven has been safely passed. In the day when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we passed through our Red Sea, and the Egyptians of our sins were drowned. Great was the marvel of mercy! To enter fully into our eternal inheritance, we have only to cross the narrow stream of death; and scarcely that, for the kingdom of heaven lieth on this side of the river as well as on the other.

I start by reminding you of this, because we are very apt to imagine that we must endure a kind of purgatory while we are on earth, and then, if we are believers, we may break loose into heaven after we have shuffled off this mortal coil. But it is not so. Heaven must be in us before we can be in heaven; and while we are yet in the wilderness, we may spy out the land, and may eat of the clusters of Eshcol. There is no such gulf between earth and heaven as gloomy thoughts suggest. Our dreams should not be of an abyss, but of a ladder whose foot is on the earth, but whose top is in glory. There would not be one hundredth part so much difference between earth and heaven if we did not live so far below our privileges. We live on the ground, when we might rise as on the wings of eagles. We are all too conscious of this body. Oh, that we were oftener where Paul was when he said, "Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot

tell: God knoweth"! If not caught up into Paradise, yet may our daily life be as the garden of the Lord.

Listen a while, ye children of God; for I speak to you, and not to others. To unbelievers, what can I say? They know nothing of spiritual things, and will not believe them, though a man should show them unto them. They are spiritually blind and dead: the Lord quicken and enlighten them! But to you that are begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, I speak with joy. Think of what you are by grace, and remember that what you will be in glory is already outlined and foreshadowed in your life in Christ. Being born from above, you are the same men that will be in heaven. You have within you the divine life—the same life which is to enjoy eternal immortality. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life": it is your possession now. As the quickened ones of the Holy Spirit, the life which is to last on for ever has begun in you.

At this moment you are already, in many respects, the same as you ever will be. I might almost repeat this passage in the Revelation concerning some of you at this very hour:—"What are these? and whence came they? These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." I might even go on to say, "Therefore are they before the throne of God"—for you abide in close communion with the King—"and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." I am straining no point when I thus speak of the sanctified.

Beloved, you are now "elect according to the foreknowledge of God," and you are "the called according to his purpose." Already you are as much forgiven as you will be when you stand without fault before the throne of God. The Lord Jesus has washed you whiter than snow, and none can lay aught to your charge. You are as completely justified by the righteousness of Christ as you ever can be; you are covered with his righteousness, and heaven itself cannot provide a robe more spotless. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." To-day we have the spirit of adoption, and enjoy access to the throne of the heavenly grace; yea, and to-day by faith we are raised up in Christ, and made to sit in the heavenlies in him. We are now united to Christ, now indwelt by the Holy Ghost: are not these great things, and heavenly things? The Lord hath brought us out of darkness into his marvellous light. Although we may, from one point of view, lament the dimness of the day, yet, as compared with our former darkness, the light is marvellous; and, best of all, it is the same light which is to brighten from dawn into mid-day. What is grace but the morning twilight of glory?

Look ye, beloved: the inheritance that is to be yours to-morrow, is, in very truth, yours to-day; for in Christ Jesus you have received the inheritance, and you have the earnest of it in the present possession of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in you. It has been well said, that all the streets of the New Jerusalem begin here. See, here is the High Street of Peace, which leads to the central palace of God; and now

we set our foot on it. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." The heavenly street of Victory, where are the palms and the harps, surely we are at the lower end of it here; for "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Everything that is to be ours in the home country *is*, in measure, ours at this moment. As sleeps the oak within the acorn, so slumbereth heaven within the first cry of "Abba, Father!" Ay, and the hallelujahs of eternity lie hidden within the groans of penitence. "God be merciful to me a sinner" has in its bowels the endless "We praise thee, O Lord." O saints, little do you know how much you have in what you have!

If I could bring believers consciously nearer to the state of glory by their more complete enjoyment of the privileges of the state of grace, I should be exceeding glad. Beloved, you will never have a better God: and "this God is our God for ever and ever." Delight yourselves in him this day. The richest saint in glory has no greater possession than his God: and even I also can say, in the words of the psalm,

"Yea, mine own God is he."

Despite your tribulation, take full delight in God your exceeding joy this morning, and be happy in him. They in heaven are shepherded by the Lamb of God, and so are you: he still carrieth the lambs in his bosom, and doth gently lead those that are with young. Even here he makes us to lie down in green pastures: what would we have more? With such a God, and such a Saviour, all you can want is that indwelling Spirit, who shall help you to realize your God, and to rejoice in your Saviour; and you have this also; for the Spirit of God dwelleth with you and is in you: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?" God the Holy Ghost is not far away, neither have we to entreat his influence, as though it were rays from a far-off star; for he abides in his people evermore. I will not say that heavenly perfection is not far superior to the highest state that we ever reach on earth; but the difference lies more in our own failure than in the nature of things. Grace, if realized to its full, would brighten off into glory. When the Holy Spirit fully possesses our being, and we yield ourselves to his power, our weakness is strength, and our infirmity is to be gloried in. Then is it true, that on earth God is with us; and there is but a step between us and heaven, where we are with God.

Thus I have conducted you to my two texts, which I have put together as an illustration of what I would teach. In the New Testament text we have the heavenly state above; and in the Old Testament text we have the state of the Lord's flock while on the way to their eternal rest. Very singular, to my mind, is the sameness of the description of the flock in the fold, and the flock feeding in the ways. The verses are almost word for word the same. When John would describe the white-robed host, he can say no more of them than Isaiah said of the pilgrim band, led by the God of mercy.

I. First, LET US CONSIDER THE HEAVENLY STATE ABOVE. The beloved John tells us what he heard and saw.

The first part of the description assures us of *the supply of every need*. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." In heaven

no need is unsatisfied, and no desire ungratified. They can have no want as to their bodies, for they are as the angels of God. Children of poverty, your straitness of bread will soon be ended, and your care shall end in plenty. The worst hunger is that of the heart; and this will be unknown above. There is a ravenous hunger, fierce as a wolf, which possesses some men: all the world cannot satisfy their greed. A thousand worlds would be scarce a mouthful for their lust. Now, in heaven there are no sinful and selfish desires. The ravening of covetousness or of ambition enters not the sacred gate. In glory there are no desires which should not be, and those desires which should be are all so tempered or so fulfilled that they can never become the cause of sorrow or pain; for, "they shall hunger no more." Even the saints need love, fellowship, rest: they have all these in union to God, in the communion of saints, and in the rest of Jesus. The unrenewed man is always thirsting; but Christ can stay this even now, for he saith, "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." Be you sure, then, that from the golden cup of glory we shall drink that which will quench all thirst for ever. There is not, in all the golden streets of heaven, a single person who is desiring what he may not have, or wanting what he cannot obtain, or even wishing for that which he has not to his hand. O happy state! Their mouth is satisfied with good things; they are filled with all the fulness of God.

And as there is in heaven a supply for every need, so is there *the removal of every ill.* Thus saith the Spirit, "Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." We are such poor creatures that excess of good soon becomes evil to us. I love the sun: if you had ever seen it shining in the clear blue heavens, you would not wonder that I speak with emphasis. Life, joy, and health stream from it in lands where it is enough of pleasure to bask in its beams. But too much of the sun overpowers us; his warmth makes men faint, his stroke destroys them. Too great a blessing may prove too heavy a cargo for the ship of life. Hence we need guarding from dangers which, at the first sight, look as if they were not perilous. In the beatific state, if these bodies of flesh and blood were still our dwelling-place, we could not live under the celestial conditions. Even here, too much of spiritual joy may prostrate a man, and cast him into a swoon. I would like to die of the disease; but still, a sickness cometh upon one to whom heavenly things are revealed in great measure, and enjoyed with special vividness. One of the saints cried out in an agony of delight, "Hold, Lord, hold! Remember I am but an earthen vessel, and can contain no more!" The Lord has to limit his revelations, because we cannot bear them now. I have heard of one who looked upon the sun imprudently, and was blinded by the light. The very sunlight of divine revelation, favour, and fellowship could readily prove too much for our feeble vision, heart, and brain. Therefore, in the glorious state flesh and blood shall be removed, and the raised body shall be strengthened to endure that fierce light which beats about the throne of Deity. As for us, as we now are, we might well cry, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?" But when the redemption of the body has come about, and the soul

has been strengthened with all might, we shall be able to be at home with our God, who is a consuming fire. "Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." May God grant us to enjoy the anticipation of that happy period when we shall behold his face, when his secret shall be with us, and we shall know even as we are known! Oh, for that day when we shall enter into the Holiest, and shall stand before the presence of his glory; and yet, so far from being afraid, shall be filled with exceeding joy!

But, further, the description of the heavenly life has this conspicuous feature—*the leading of the Lamb*. "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them." It is heaven to be personally shepherded by him who is the Great Sacrifice. In this present state we have earthly shepherds; and when God graciously feeds us by men after his own heart, whom he himself instructs, we prize them much. Those whom the Lord ordains to feed his flock we love, and their faith we follow, for the Lord makes them of great service to us; but still, they are only underlings, and we do not forget their imperfections, and their dependence upon their Lord. But in the glory-land "that Great Shepherd of the sheep" will himself personally minister to us. Those dear lips that are as lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh, shall speak directly to each one of our hearts. We shall hear his voice, we shall behold his face, we shall be fed by his hand, we shall follow at his heel. How gloriously will he "stand and feed"! How restfully shall we lie down in green pastures!

He shall feed us in his dearest character. As the Lamb he revealed his greatest love, and as the Lamb will he lead and feed us for ever. The Revised Version wisely renders the passage, "The Lamb in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd." We are never fed so sweetly by our Lord himself as when he reveals to us most clearly his character as the sacrifice for sin. The atoning sacrifice is the centre of the sun of infinite love, the light of light. There is no truth like it for the revelation of God. Christ in his wounds and bloody sweat is Christ indeed. "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." With this truth before us, his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed. In heaven we shall know him far better than we do now as the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, the Lamb of God's Passover, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." That deep peace, that eternally unbroken rest which we shall derive from a sight of the Great Sacrifice, will be a chief ingredient in the bliss of heaven. "The Lamb shall feed them."

But though we shall see our Lord as a Lamb, it will not be in a state of humiliation, but in a condition of power and honour. "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them." Heaven will largely consist of expanded views of King Jesus, and nearer beholdings of the glory which follows upon his sacrificial grief. Ah, brethren, how little do we know his glory! We scarce know who he is that has befriended us. We hold the doctrine of his Deity tenaciously; but in heaven we shall perceive his Godhead in its truth so far as the finite can apprehend the infinite. We have known his friendship to us, but when we shall behold the King in his beauty in his own halls, and our eyes shall look into his royal countenance,

and his face, which outshineth the sun, shall beam ineffable affection upon each one of us, then shall we find our heaven in his glory. We ask no thrones; his throne is ours. The enthroned Lamb himself is all the heaven we desire.

Then the last point of the description is full of meaning. *The drinking at the fountain* is the secret of the ineffable bliss. "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters." We are compelled to thirst at times, like the poor flock of slaughter which we see driven through our London streets; and, alas! we stop at the very puddles by the way, and would refresh ourselves at them, if we could. This will never happen to us when we reach the land where flows the river of the water of life. There the sheep drink of no stagnant waters, or bitter wells, but they are satisfied from living fountains of waters. Comfort is measurably to be found in the streams of providential mercies, and therefore they are to be received with gratitude; but yet common blessings are unfilling things to souls quickened by grace. Corn can fill the barn, but not the heart. Of the wells of earth we may say, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again"; but when we go beyond temporal supplies, and live upon God himself, then the soul receives a draught of far truer and more enduring refreshment; even as our Lord Jesus said to the woman at the well, "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." In heaven the happy ones live not on bread, which is the staff of life, but on God, who is life itself. The second cause is passed over, and the first cause alone is seen.

In the home country souls have no need of the means of grace, for they have reached the God of grace. The means of grace are like conduit-pipes, which bring down the living water to us: but we have found them fail us; and at times we have used them in so faulty a way that the water has lost its freshness, or has even been made to taste of the pipe through which it flowed. Fruit is best when gathered fresh from the garden: the fingering of the market destroys the bloom. We have too much of this in our ministries. Brethren, we shall soon drink living water at the well-head, and gather the golden fruit from him who is "as the apple tree among the trees of the wood." We shall have no need of baptisms and breakings of bread, nor of churches and pastors. We shall not need the golden chalices or the earthen vessels which now serve our turn so well, but we shall come to the river's source, and drink our full. "He shall lead them unto living fountains of water."

At times, alas! we know what it is to come to the pits and find no water; and then we try to live on happy memories. We sing, and sigh; or sigh, and sing—

> "What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
> How sweet their memory still!
> But they have left an aching void
> The world can never fill."

A cake made of memories will do for a bite now and then, but it makes poor daily bread. We want the present enjoyment of God.

We need still to go to the fountain for new supplies; for water which standeth long in the pitcher loses its cool and refreshing excellence. Happy is the man that is not living upon the memories of what he used to enjoy, but is even now in the banqueting-house! The present and perpetual renewal of first love and first delight in God is heaven.

Heaven is to know the substance and the secret of the divine life—not to hold a cup, but to drink of the living water. The doctrine is precious, but it is far better to know the thing about which the doctrine speaks. The doctrine is the salver of silver, but the blessing itself is the apple of gold. Blessed are they that are always fed on the substance of the truth, the verity of verities, the essence of essential things.

"He shall lead them unto fountains." There the eternal source is unveiled: they not only receive the mercy, but they see how it comes, and whence it flows: they not only drink, but they drink with their eye upon the glorious Well-head. Did you ever see a boy on a hot day lie down, when he has been thirsty, and put his mouth down to the top of the water at the brim of the well? How he draws up the cool refreshment! Drink away, poor child! He has no fear that he will drink the well dry, nor have we. How pleasant it is to take from the inexhaustible! That which we drink is all the sweeter, because of the measureless remainder. Enough is not enough: but when we have God for our all in all, then are we content. When I am near to God, and dwell in the overflowing of his love, I feel like the cattle on a burning summer's day when they take to the brook which ripples around them up to their knees, and there they stand, filled, cooled, and sweetly refreshed. O my God, in thee I feel that I have not only all that I can contain, but all that containeth me. In thee I live and move with perfect content. Such is heaven! We shall have bliss within and bliss around us; we ourselves drinking at the source, and dwelling by the well for ever. The fact is, that heaven is God fully enjoyed. The evil that God hates will be wholly cast out; the capacity which God gives will be enlarged and prepared for full fruition, and our whole being will be taken up with God, the ever-blessed, from whom we came, and to whom it will be heaven to return. Who knoweth God knoweth heaven. The source of all things is our fountain of living waters.

Thus I could occupy all the morning with my first head; but I must not tarry, or I shall miss my aim, which is to show you that, even here, we may outline glory and in the wilderness we may have the pattern of things in the heavens. This you will see by carefully referring to the second text.

II. LET US CONSIDER THE HEAVENLY STATE BELOW. I think I have heard you saying, "Ah! this is all about heaven; but we have not yet come to it. We are still wrestling here below." Well, well; if we cannot go to heaven at once, heaven can come to us. The words which I will now read refer to the days of earth, the times when the sheep feed in the ways, and come from the north and from the south at the call of the shepherd. "*They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.*"

Look at the former passage and at this. The whole description is the same. When I noticed this parallel, I stood amazed. John, thou art a great artist; I entreat thee, paint me a picture of heaven! Isaiah, thou also hast a great soul; draw me a picture of the life of the saintly ones on earth when their Lord is with them! I have both pictures. They are masterpieces. I look at them, and they are so much alike, that I wonder if there be not some mistake. Surely they are depicting the same thing. The forms, the lights and shades, the touches and the tones are not only alike, but identical. Amazed, I cry, "Which is heaven, and which is the heavenly life on earth?" The artists know their own work, and by their instruction I will be led. Isaiah painted our Lord's sheep in his presence on the way to heaven, and John drew the same flock in the glory with the Lamb; and the fact that the pictures are so much alike is full of suggestive teaching. Here are the same ideas in the same words. Brethren, may you and I as fully believe and enjoy the second passage, as we hope to realize and enjoy the first Scripture when we get home to heaven.

First, here is a promise that *every want shall be supplied.* "They shall not hunger nor thirst." If we are the Lord's people and are trusting in him, this shall be true in every possible sense. Literally, "your bread shall be given you, your water shall be sure." You shall have no anxious thought concerning what you shall eat, and what you shall drink. But, mark you, if you should know the trials of poverty, and should be greatly tried, and brought very low in temporal things, yet the Lord's presence and sensible consolations shall so sustain you that spiritually and inwardly you shall know neither hunger nor thirst. Many saints have found riches in poverty, ease in labour, rest in pain, and delight in affliction. Our Lord can so adapt our minds to our circumstances, that the bitter is sweet, and the burden is light. Paul speaks of the saints "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." Note well that the sorrow has an "as" connected with it; but the rejoicing is a fact. "They shall not hunger nor thirst." If you live in God, you shall have no ungratified desire. "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." There may be many things that you would like to have, and you may never have them; but then you will prefer to be without them, saying, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." If Christ be with you, you will be so happy in him that wanton, wandering wishes will be like the birds which may fly over your head, but dare not make their nests in your hair. You will be without a peevish craving, or a pining ambition, or a carking care. "Oh," says a believer, "I wish I could reach that state." You may reach it: you are on the way to it. Only love Christ more, and be more like him, and you shall be satisfied with favour, and sing, "All my springs are in thee"; "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him."

I do not mean that the saints find a full content in this world's goods, but that they find such content in God, that with them or without them they live in wealth. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of that which he possesseth; and many a man who has had next to nothing that could be seen with eyes or handled with

hands, has been a very millionaire for true wealth in possessing the kingdom of the Most High. The Lord has brought some of us into that state in which we have all things in him; and it is true to us, "They shall not hunger nor thirst."

Then, next, there is such a thing as having *every evil removed* from you while yet in this wilderness. "Neither shall the heat nor sun smite them." Suppose God favours you with prosperity; if you live near to God you will not be rendered proud or worldly-minded by your prosperity. Suppose you should become popular because of your usefulness; you will not be puffed up if Christ Jesus is your continual leader and shepherd. If you live near to him, you will be lowly. If your days are spent in sunlight, and you go from joy to joy, yet still no sunstroke shall smite you. If still you dwell in God, and your heart is full of Christ, and you are led as a sheep by him, no measure of heat shall overpower you. It is a mistake to think that our safety or our danger is according to our circumstances; our safety or our danger is according to our nearness to God, or our distance from him. A man who is near to God can stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and the devil may tempt him to throw himself down, and yet he will be firm as the temple itself. A man that is without God may be in the safest part of the road, and traverse a level way, and yet he will stumble. It is not the road, but the Lord that keepeth the pilgrim's foot. O heir of heaven, commit thou thy way unto God, and make him thine all in all, and rise above the creature into the Creator, and then shalt thou hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the heat nor the sun smite thee.

Further, it is said, that on earth we may enjoy *the leading of the Lord.* See how it is put: "For he that hath mercy on them shall lead them." Here we have not quite the same words as in the Revelation, for there we read, "The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall lead them." Yet the sense is but another shade of the same meaning. Oh, but that is a sweet, sweet name: is it not? "He that *hath* mercy on them." He has saved them, and so *has had* mercy on them. Yes, that is very precious, but the word is sweeter still—"He that *hath* mercy on them," he that is always having mercy on them, he that follows them with mercy all the days of their lives, he that continually pardons, upholds, supplies, strengthens, and thus daily loadeth them with benefits: "He that hath mercy on them shall lead them."

Do you know, beloved friends, what it is to be led of the Lord? Many are led by their own tastes and fancies. They will go wrong. Others are led by their own judgments. But these are not infallible, and they may go wrong. More are led by other people; these may go right, but it is far from likely that they will. He that is led of God, he is the happy man, he shall not err. He shall be conducted providentially in a right way to the city of habitations. Commit your way unto the Lord: trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass. It may be a rough way, but it must be a right way if we follow the track of the Lord's feet. The true believer shall be led by the Spirit of God in sacred matters: "He will guide you into all truth." He that hath mercy on us in other things will have

mercy on us by teaching us to profit. We shall each one sing, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." We shall be led into duty and through struggles; we shall be led to happy attainments and gracious enjoyments; we shall go from strength to strength.

In the case of the gracious soul, earth becomes like heaven, because he walks with God. He that hath mercy on him visits him, communes with him, and manifests himself to him. A shepherd goeth before his flock, and the true sheep follow him. Blessed are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. They have a love to their Lord, and therefore they only want to know which way he would have them go, and they feel drawn along it by the cords of love and the bands of a man. If they can get a glance from their Lord's eye it suffices them: as it is written, "I will guide thee with mine eye." Every day they stand anxiously attentive to do the King's commandment, be it what it may. They yield themselves and their members to him to be instruments of righteousness, vessels fit for the Master's use. Beloved, this is heaven below. If you have ever tried it, you know it is so. If you have never fully tried it, try it now, and you will find a new joy in it. Jesus says to you, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

I do not know anything more delightful than to be such a fool, as the world will call you, as to yield your intellect to the teaching of the Lord; and to be so weak that you cannot judge but accept his will; and so incapable that even to will and to do must be wrought in you of the Lord. Oh, to be so unselfed as to take anything from Christ far more gladly than you would choose of your own accord! If your Lord puts his hand into the bitter box, you will think the potion sweet; and if he scourge, you will thank him for being so kind as to think of you at all. When you get to that point, that you are as a sheep to whom God himself is the Shepherd, it is well with you. Then you will realize, even in the pastures of the wilderness, how the rain from heaven drops upon the inheritance of the Lord, and refreshes it when it is weary. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." God give you to know it, dear friends! I can speak experimentally of it: it is not only the antepast of heaven, but a part of the banquet itself.

But now the last touch is *the drinking at the spring-head.* We were not surprised to find, in our description of heaven, that the Lamb led them to the fountains of waters; but we are delighted to find that, here below, "even by the springs of water shall he guide them." Beloved, covet earnestly this drinking at the springs. It is not all who profess to be Christians who will know what I am talking about this morning: they will think I have got into the way of the mystics, and am dreaming of things unpractical. I will not argue with *them;* let me speak to those who understand me.

Beloved in the Lord, you can even now live upon God himself, and there is no living comparable to it. You can get beyond all the cisterns, and come to the river of the water of life, even as they do in heaven. To live by second causes is a very secondary life: to live on

the First Cause is the first of living. I exhort you to do this with regard to the inspired Word. This is a day of man's opinions, views, judgments, criticisms. Leave them all, good, bad, and indifferent, and come to this Book, which is the pure fount of inspiration undefiled. When you study the Word of God, live upon it as his Word. I am not going to defend it; it needs no defence. I am not going to argue about its inspiration; if you know the Lord aright, his Word is inspired to you, if to no one else. You know not only that it was inspired when it was written, but that it is inspired still; and, moreover, its inspiration affects you in a way in which no other writings can ever touch you. It breathes upon you; it breathes life into you, and makes you to speak words for God, which prove to be words from God to other souls. Oh, it is wonderful, if you read the word of God in a little company, morning by morning—simply read it and pray over it, what an effect it may have upon all who listen! I speak what I do know. If you read the inspired words themselves, and look up to him who spoke them, their spiritual effect will be the witness of their inspiration. This is a miracle-working Book: it may be opposed, but never conquered; it may be buried under unbelief, but it must rise again. Blessed are they to whom the Word is meat and drink. They quit the cistern of man for the fountain of God; and they do well. "By the springs of water shall he guide them."

Yet I would exhort you not even to tarry at the letter of God's word, but believingly and humbly advance to drink from the Holy Ghost himself. He will not teach you anything which is not in the Bible, but he will take of the things of Christ, and will show them unto you. A truth may be like a jewel in the Word of God, and yet we may not see its brilliance until the Holy Spirit holds it up in the light and bids us mark its lustre. The Spirit of God brings up the pearl from the deeps of revelation, and sets it where its radiance is perceived by the believing eye. We are such poor scholars that we learn little from the Book till "the Interpreter, one of a thousand," opens our heart to the Word, and opens the Word to our heart. The Holy Ghost who revealed truth in the Book, must also personally reveal it to the individual. If ever you get a hold of truth in that way, you will never give it up. A man who has learned truth from one minister, may unlearn it from another minister; but he that has been taught it of the Holy Ghost, has a treasure which no man taketh from him.

Beloved, we would exhort you to drink of the springs of living water while you are here. Be often going back to fundamental doctrines. Especially get back to the consideration of covenant engagements. Whence come all the deeds of mercy from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ? Come they not from eternal purposes, and from that covenant, "ordered in all things, and sure," made or ever the earth was, between the Father and the ever-blessed Son? Get you often to the well of the covenant. I know of nothing that can make you so happy as to know in your very soul how the Father pledged himself by oath to the Son, and the Son pledged himself to the eternal Father concerning the great mystery of our redemption. Eternal love and covenant faithfulness: these are

ancient wells. Do not hesitate to drink deep at the fountain of electing love. The Lord himself chose you, having loved you with an everlasting love. Everything comes to the saints "according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." The Philistines have stopped this well full many a time, but they cannot prevent its waters bubbling up from among the stones which they have cast into it. There it stands. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Get you back to the love that had no cause but the First Cause, to the love that knows no change, to the love that knows no limit, no hesitancy, no diminution, the love that stands, like the Godhead itself, eternal and immovable. Drink from eternal springs; and if you do so, your life will be more and more "as the days of heaven upon the earth." God grant us to get away from the deceitful brooks to "the deep which lieth under," and with joy may we draw water.

Christ's presence, and fountain drinking—give me these two things, and I ask no more. The Lamb to feed me, and the fountain to supply me; these are enough. Lord, whom have I in heaven but thee? Come poverty, come sickness, come shame, come casting out by brethren; yea, come death itself, nothing can I want, and nothing can harm me if the Lamb be my Shepherd and the Lord my fountain.

Before another Sunday some of us may be in heaven. Before this month has finished, some of us may know infinitely more about the eternal world than the whole assembly of divines could tell us. Others of us may have to linger here a while. Yet are we not in banishment. Here we dwell with the King for his work. We will endeavour to keep close to our Master, and if we may serve him and see his face, we will not grudge the glorified their fuller joys.

You that know nothing about these things, God grant you spiritual sense to know that you do not know, and then give you further grace to pray to him, "Lord, lead me to the living fountains." There is an inner life, there is a heavenly secret, there is a surpassing joy; some of us know it, we wish that you, also, had it. Cry for it. Jesus can give it you at once. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt live for ever. The new birth goes with faith in Christ. May he give it you this morning, and may you begin to be heavenly here, that you may be fit for heaven hereafter. The Lord bless you, dear friends, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Revelation vii. 9.—17; Isaiah xlix. 1—10.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—416, 720, 859.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

PLEADING, NOT CONTRADICTION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 9TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"She said, Truth, Lord: yet."—Matthew xv. 27.

DID you notice, in the reading of this narrative of the Syro-Phœnician woman, the two facts mentioned in the twenty-first and twenty-second verses? "Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts." See, Jesus goes towards the coast of Sidon on the land side, and the woman of Canaan comes from the sea-shore to meet him; and so they come to the same town. May we find that case repeated this morning in this Tabernacle! May our Lord Jesus come into this congregation with power to cast out the devil; and may some one—nay, may many—have come to this place on purpose to seek grace at his hands! Blessed shall be this day's meeting! See how the grace of God arranges things. Jesus and the seeker have a common attraction. He comes, and she comes. It would have been of no use her coming from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon if the Lord Jesus had not also come down to the Israelite border of Phœnicia to meet her. His coming makes her coming a success. What a happy circumstance when Christ meets the sinner, and the sinner meets his Lord!

Our Lord Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, came that way, drawn by the instincts of his heart: he was seeking after lost ones, and he seemed to feel that there was one to be found on the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and, therefore, he must go that way to find that one. It does not appear that he preached, or did anything special upon the road; he left the ninety and nine by the sea of Galilee to seek that one lost sheep by the Mediterranean shore. When he had dealt with her he went back again to his old haunts in Galilee.

Our Lord was drawn towards this woman, but she, also, was driven towards him. What made her seek him? Strange to say, a devil had a hand in it; but not so as to give the devil any of the praise. The truth was, that a gracious God used the devil himself to drive this woman to Jesus: for her daughter was "grievously vexed with

a devil," and she could not bear to stay at home and see her child in such misery. Oh, how often does a great sorrow drive men and women to Christ, even as a fierce wind compels the mariner to hasten to the harbour! I have known a domestic affliction, a daughter sore vexed, influence the heart of a mother to seek the Saviour; and, doubtless, many a father, broken in spirit by the likelihood of losing a darling child, has turned his face towards the Lord Jesus in his distress. Ah, my Lord! thou hast many ways of bringing thy wandering sheep back; and among the rest thou dost even send the black dog of sorrow and of sickness after them. This dog comes into the house, and his howlings are so dreadful that the poor lost sheep flies to the Shepherd for shelter. God make it so this morning with any of you who have a great trouble at home! May your boy's sickness work your health! Yes, may your girl's death be the means of the father's spiritual life! Oh, that your soul and Jesus may meet this day! Your Saviour drawn by love, and your poor heart driven by anguish—may you thus be brought to a gracious meeting-place!

Now, you would suppose that as the two were seeking each other, the happy meeting and the gracious blessing would be very easily brought about; but we have an old proverb, that "the course of true love never does run smooth"; and for certain, the course of true faith is seldom without trials. Here was genuine love in the heart of Christ towards this woman, and genuine faith in her heart towards Christ; but difficulties sprang up which we should never have looked for. It is for the good of us all that they occurred, but we could not have anticipated them. Perhaps there were more difficulties in the way of this woman than of anybody else that ever came to Jesus in the days of his flesh. I never saw the Saviour before in such a mood as when he spake to this woman of great faith. Did you ever read of his speaking such rough words? Did such a hard sentence, at any other time, ever fall from his lips as, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs"? Ah! he knew her well, and he knew that she could stand the trial, and would be greatly benefited by it, and that he would be glorified by her faith throughout all future ages: therefore with good reason he put her through the athletic exercises which train a vigorous faith. Doubtless, for our sakes, he drew her through a test to which he would never have exposed her had she been a weakling unable to sustain it. She was trained and developed by his rebuffs. While his wisdom tried her, his grace sustained her.

Now, see how he began. The Saviour was come to the town, wherever it was; but he was not there in public; on the contrary, he sought seclusion. Mark tells us, in his seventh chapter, at the twenty-fourth verse, "From thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid. For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet."

Why is he hiding from her? He does not usually avoid the quest of the seeking soul. "Where is he?" she asks of his disciples. They give her no information; they had their Master's orders to let him

remain in hiding. He sought quiet, and needed it, and so they discreetly held their tongues. Yet she found him out, and fell at his feet. Half a hint was dropped; she took up the trail, and followed it until she discovered the house, and sought the Lord in his abode. Here was the beginning of her trial: the Saviour was in hiding. "But he could not be hid" from her eager search; she was all ear and eye for him, and nothing can be hid from an anxious mother, eager to bless her child. Disturbed by her, the Blessed One comes into the street, and his disciples surround him. She determines to be heard over their heads, and therefore she begins to cry aloud, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David." As he walks along, she still cries out with mighty cries and pleadings, till the streets ring with her voice, and he who "would have no man know it" is proclaimer in the market place. Peter does not like it; he prefers quiet worship. John feels a great deal disturbed by the noise: he lost a sentence just now, a very precious sentence, which the Lord was uttering. The woman's noise was very distracting to everybody, and so the disciples came to Jesus, and they said, "Send her away, send her away; do something for her, or tell her to be gone; for she crieth after us, we have no peace for her clamour; we cannot hear thee speak because of her piteous cries." Meanwhile, she, perceiving them speaking to Jesus, comes nearer, breaks into the inner circle, falls down before him, worships him, and utters this plaintive prayer—"Lord, help me." There is more power in worship than in noise; she has taken a step in advance. Our Lord has not yet answered her a single word. He has heard what she said, no doubt; but he has not answered a word to her as yet. All that he has done is to say to his disciples, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That has not prevented her nearer approach, or stopped her prayer; for now she pleads, "Lord, help me." At length the Blessed One does speak to her. Greatly to our surprise, it is a chill rebuff. What a cold word it is! How cutting! I dare not say, how cruel! yet it seemed so. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Now, what will the woman do? She is near the Saviour; she has an audience with him, such as it is; she is on her knees before him, and he appears to repulse her! How will she act now? Here is the point about which I am going to speak. She will not be repulsed, she perseveres, she advances nearer, she actually turns the rebuff into a plea. She has come for a blessing, and a blessing she believes that she shall have, and she means to plead for it till she wins it. So she deals with the Saviour after a very heroic manner, and in the wisest possible style; from which I want every seeker to learn a lesson at this time, that he, like her, may win with Christ, and hear the Master say to him this morning, "Great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Three pieces of advice I gather from this woman's example. First, *agree with the Lord whatever he says.* Say, "Truth, Lord; truth, Lord." Say "Yes" to all his words. Secondly, *plead with the Lord*—"Truth, Lord; yet," "yet." Think of another truth, and mention it to him as a plea. Say, "Lord, I must maintain my hold; I must plead with thee yet." And thirdly, *in any case have faith in the Lord, whatever he saith.*

However he tries thee, still believe in him with unstaggering faith, and know of a surety that he deserves thine utmost confidence in his love and power.

I. My first advice to every heart here seeking the Saviour is this, AGREE WITH THE LORD. In the Revised Version we read that she said, "Yea, Lord," or, "Yes, Lord." Whatever Jesus said, she did not contradict him in the least. I like the old translation, "Truth, Lord," for it is very expressive. She did not say, "It is hard, or unkind"; but "It is true. It is true that it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. It is true that compared with Israel I am a dog: for me to gain this blessing would be like a dog's feeding on the children's bread. Truth, Lord; truth, Lord." Now, dear friend, if thou art dealing with the Lord for life and death, *never contradict his word.* Thou wilt never come unto perfect peace if thou art in a contradicting humour; for that is a proud and unacceptable condition of mind. He that reads his Bible to find fault with it will soon discover that the Bible finds fault with him. It may be said of the Book of God as of its Author: "If ye walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you." Of this Book I may truly say, "With the froward thou wilt show thyself froward."

Remember, dear friends, that *if the Lord reminds you of your unworthiness and your unfitness, he only tells you what is true*, and it will be your wisdom to say, "Truth, Lord." Scripture describes you as having a depraved nature: say, "Truth, Lord." It describes you as going astray like a lost sheep, and the charge is true. It describes you as having a deceitful heart, and just such a heart you have. Therefore say, "Truth, Lord." It represents you as "without strength," and "without hope." Let your answer be, "Truth, Lord." The Bible never gives unrenewed human nature a good word, nor does it deserve it. It exposes our corruptions, and lays bare our falseness, pride, and unbelief. Cavil not at the faithfulness of the Word. Take the lowest place, and own yourself a sinner, lost, ruined, and undone. If the Scripture should seem to degrade you, do not take umbrage thereat, but feel that it deals honestly with you. Never let proud nature contradict the Lord, for this is to increase your sin. This woman took the very lowest possible place. She not only admitted that she was like one of the little dogs, but she put herself under the table, and under the children's table, rather than under the master's table. She said, "The dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Most of you have supposed that she referred to the crumbs that fell from the table of the master of the house himself. If you will kindly look at the passage you will see that it is not so. "Their masters'" refers to several masters: the word is plural, and refers to the children who were the little masters of the little dogs. Thus she humbled herself to be not only as a dog to the Lord, but as a dog to the house of Israel—to the Jews. This was going very far indeed, for a Tyrian woman, of proud Sidonian blood, to admit that the house of Israel were to her as masters, that these disciples who had said just now, "Send her away," stood in the same relation to her as the children of the family stand in towards the little

dogs under the table. Great faith is always sister to great humility. It does not matter how low Christ puts her, she sits *there*. "Truth, Lord." I earnestly recommend every hearer of mine to consent unto the Lord's verdict, and never to raise an argument against The Sinner's Friend. When thy heart is heavy, when thou hast a sense of being the greatest of sinners, I pray thee remember that thou art a greater sinner than thou thinkest thyself to be. Though conscience has rated thee very low, thou mayest go lower still, and yet be in thy right place; for, truth to tell, thou art as bad as bad can be; thou art worse than thy darkest thoughts have ever painted thee; thou art a wretch most undeserving, and hell-deserving; and apart from sovereign grace thy case is hopeless. If thou wert now in hell, thou wouldst have no cause to complain against the justice of God, for thou deservest to be there. I would to God that every hearer here who has not yet found mercy would consent to the severest declarations of God's Word; for they are all true, and true to him. Oh, that you would say, "Yes, Lord: I have not a syllable to say in self-defence"!

And, next, *if it should appear to your humbled heart to be a very strange thing for you to think of being saved, do not fight against that belief.* If a sense of divine justice should suggest to you—"What! You saved? Then you will be the greatest wonder on earth! What! You saved! Surely, God will have gone beyond all former mercy in pardoning such a one as you are. In that case, he would have taken the children's bread and cast it to a dog. You are so unworthy, and so insignificant and useless, that even if you are saved, you will be good for nothing in holy service." How can you expect the blessing? Do not attempt to argue to the contrary. Seek not to magnify yourself; but cry: "Lord, I agree with thy valuation of me. I freely admit that if I be forgiven, if I am made a child of God, and if I enter heaven, I shall be the greatest marvel of immeasurable love and boundless grace that ever yet lived in earth or heaven."

We should be the more ready to give our assent and consent to every syllable of the divine word, since *Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves.* The Word of God knows more about us than we can ever discover about ourselves. We are partial to ourselves, and hence we are half blind. Our judgment always fails to hold the balance evenly when our own case is in the weighing. What man is there who is not on good terms with himself? Your faults, of course, are always excusable; and if you do a little good, why, it deserves to be talked of, and to be estimated at the rate of diamonds of the first water. Each one of us is a very superior person; so our proud heart tells us. Our Lord Jesus does not flatter us, he lets us see our case as it is: his searching eye perceives the naked truth of things, and as "the faithful and true Witness" he deals with us after the rule of uprightness. O seeking soul, Jesus loves you too well to flatter you. Therefore, I pray you, have such confidence in him that, however much he, by his Word and Spirit, may rebuke, reprove, and even condemn you, you may without hesitation reply, "Truth, Lord! Truth, Lord!"

Nothing can be gained by cavilling with the Saviour. A beggar stands at your door and asks for charity: he goes the wrong way to work if he begins a discussion with you, and contradicts your statements. If

beggars must not be choosers, certainly they must not be controversialists. If a mendicant will dispute, let him dispute; but let him give up begging. If he cavils as to how he shall receive your gift, or how or what you shall give him, he is likely to be sent about his business. A critical sinner disputing with his Saviour is a fool in capitals. As for me, my mind is made up that I will quarrel with anybody sooner than with my Saviour; and especially I will contend with myself, and pick a desperate quarrel with my own pride, rather than have a shade of difference with my Lord. To contend with one's Benefactor is folly indeed! For the justly condemned to quibble with the Lawgiver in whom is vested the prerogative of pardon would be folly. Instead of that, with heart and soul I cry, "Lord, whatever I find in thy Word, whatever I read in Holy Scripture, which is the revelation of thy mind, I do believe it, I will believe it, I must believe it; and I, therefore, say, 'Truth, Lord!' It is all true, though it condemn me for ever."

Now, mark this: if you find your heart agreeing with what Jesus says, even when he answers you roughly, you may depend upon it *this is a work of grace;* for human nature is very upstart, and stands very much upon its silly dignity, and therefore it contradicts the Lord, when he deals truthfully with it, and humbles it. Human nature, if you want to see it in its true condition, is that naked thing over yonder, which so proudly aims at covering itself with a dress of its own devising. See, it sews fig leaves together to make itself an apron! What a destitute object! With its withered leaves about it, it seems worse than naked! Yet this wretched human nature proudly rebels against salvation by Christ. It will not hear of imputed righteousness: its own righteousness is dearer far. Woe be to the crown of pride which rivals the Lord Christ! If, my hearer, thou art of another mind, and art willing to own thyself a sinner, lost, ruined, and condemned, it is well with thee. If thou art of this mind, that whatever humbling truth the Spirit of God may teach thee in the Word, or teach by the conviction of thy conscience, thou wilt at once agree therewith, and confess, "It is even so"; then the Spirit of God has brought thee to this humble and truthful and obedient condition, and things are going hopefully with thee.

The Lord Jesus has not come to save you proud and arrogant ones, who sit on your thrones and look down contemptuously on others. Sit there as long as you can, until your thrones and yourselves dissolve into perdition: there is no hope for you. But you who lie upon the dunghill, you who feel as worthless as the broken potsherds around you, you who mourn that you cannot rise from that dunghill without divine help—you are the men whom he will lift from your mean estate and set you among princes, even the princes of his people. See the spokes of yonder wheel! They that are highest shall be lowest; they that are lowest shall be raised on high. This is how the Lord turneth things upside down. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away." If thou findest it in thy heart to say, "Truth, Lord," to all that the Holy Spirit teaches, then surely that same Spirit is at work upon thy soul, leading thee

to look to Jesus, and causing thee to give thy heart's consent to the way of salvation through the merit of the Redeemer's blood.

II. And now my second point is this: although you must not cavil with Christ, you may PLEAD WITH HIM. "Truth, Lord," she says; but she adds, "yet."

Here, then, is my first lesson: *set one truth over against another*. Do not contradict a frowning truth, but bring up a smiling one to meet it. Remember how the Jews were saved out of the hands of their enemies in the days of Haman and Mordecai. The king issued a decree that, on a certain day, the people might rise up against the Jews, and slay them, and take their possessions as a spoil. Now, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, this could not be altered: the decree must stand. What then? How was it to be got over? Why, by meeting that ordinance by another. Another decree is issued, that although the people might rise against the Jews, yet the Jews might defend themselves; and if anybody dared to hurt them, they might slay them, and take their property to be a prey. One decree thus counteracted another. How often we may use the holy art of looking from one doctrine to another! If a truth looks black upon me, I shall not be wise to be always dwelling upon it; but it will be my wisdom to examine the whole range of truth, and see if there be not some other doctrine which will give me hope. David practised this when he said of himself, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee." And then he most confidently added, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand." He does not contradict himself; and yet the second utterance removes all the bitterness which the first sentence left upon the palate. The two sentences together set forth the supreme grace of God, who enabled a poor beast-like being to commune with himself. I beg you to learn this holy art of setting one truth side by side with another, that thus you may have a fair view of the whole situation, and may not despair.

For instance, I meet with men who say, "O sir, sin is an awful thing; it condemns me. I feel I can never answer the Lord for my iniquities, nor stand in his holy presence." This is assuredly true; but remember another truth: "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"; "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin"; "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Set the truth of the sin-bearing of our Lord over against the guilt and curse of sin due to yourself apart from your great Substitute.

"The Lord has an elect people," cries one, "and this discourages me." Why should it? Do not contradict that truth; believe it as you read it in God's Word: but hear how Jesus puts it: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." To you who are weak, simple, and trustful as babes, the doctrine is full of comfort. If the Lord will save a number that no man can number, why should he not save me? It is true it is written, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me"; but it is also written, "And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Let the second half of the saying be accepted as well as the first half.

Some are stumbled by the sovereignty of God. He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. He may justly ask, "Shall I not do as I will with my own?" Beloved, do not dispute the rights of the eternal God. It is the Lord: let him do as seemeth him good. Do not quarrel with the King; but come humbly to him, and plead thus: "O Lord, thou alone hast the right to pardon; but then thy Word declares that if we confess our sins, thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins; and thou hast said, that whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved." This pleading will prevail. Kick not at truth, lest thou dash thy naked foot against iron pricks. Yet, dwell not on one truth till it distracts thee, but look at others till they cheer thee. Submit to all truth, but plead on thine own behalf that which seems to thee to look favourably upon thee. When thou readest, "Ye must be born again," do not be angry. It is true that to be born again is a work beyond thy power: it is the work of the Holy Spirit; and this need of a work beyond thy reach may well distress thee. But that third chapter of John, which says, "Ye must be born again," also says, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Thus, it is clear that he that believeth in Jesus is born again. I pray thee, have an eye to all the land of truth, and when thou seemest to be persecuted in one city of truth, flee to another; for there is a refuge city even for thee. Besides, there is a bright side to every truth, if thou hast but the wit to spy it out. The same key which locks will also unlock: very much depends on the turn of the key, and still more on the turn of thy thought.

This brings me to a second remark: *draw comfort even from a hard truth.* Take this advice in preference to that which I have already given. The Authorized translation here is very good, but I must confess that it is not quite so true to the woman's meaning as the Revised Version. She did not say, "Truth, Lord: *yet*," as if she were raising an objection, as I have already put it to you; but she said, "Truth, Lord, for." I have gone with the old translation, because it expresses the way in which our mind too generally looks at things. We fancy that we set one truth over against another, whereas all truths are agreed, and cannot be in conflict. Out of the very truth which looks darkest we may gain consolation. She said, "Yes, Lord; *for* the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." She did not draw comfort from another truth which seemed to neutralize the first; but, as the bee sucks honey from the nettle, so did she gather encouragement from the severe Word of the Lord—"It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." She said, "That is true, Lord, for even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She had not to turn what Christ said upside down; she took it as it stood, and spied out comfort in it. Earnestly would I urge you to learn the art of deriving comfort from every statement of God's Word; not necessarily bringing up a second doctrine, but believing that even the present truth which bears a threatening aspect is yet your friend.

Do I hear you say, "How can I have hope? for salvation is of

the Lord." Why, that is the very reason why you should be filled with hope, and seek salvation of the Lord alone. If it were of yourself, you might despair; but as it is of the Lord, you may have hope.

Do you groan out, "Alas! I can do nothing"? What of that? The Lord can do everything. Since salvation is of the Lord alone, ask him to be its Alpha and Omega to you. Do you groan, "I know I must repent; but I am so unfeeling that I cannot reach the right measure of tenderness." This is true, and therefore the Lord Jesus is exalted on high to give repentance. You will no more repent in your own power than you will go to heaven in your own merit; but the Lord will grant you repentance unto life; for this, also, is a fruit of the Spirit.

Beloved, when I was under a sense of sin I heard the doctrine of divine sovereignty, "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy"; but that did not frighten me at all; for I felt more hopeful of grace through the sovereign will of God than by any other way. If pardon be not a matter of human deserving, but of divine prerogative, then there is hope for me. Why should not I be forgiven as well as others? If the Lord had only three elect ones, and these were chosen according to his own good pleasure, why should not I be one of them? I laid myself at his feet, and gave up every hope but that which flowed from his mercy. Knowing that he would save a number that no man could number, and that he would save every soul that believed in Jesus, I believed and was saved. It was well for me that salvation did not turn upon merit; for I had no merit whatever. If it remained with sovereign grace, then I also could go through that door; for the Lord might as well save me as any other sinner; and inasmuch as I read, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," I even came, and he did not cast me out. Rightly understood, every truth in God's word leads to Jesus, and no single word drives the seeking sinner back. If thou be a fine fellow, full of thine own righteousness, every gospel truth looks black on thee; but if thou be a sinner deserving nothing of God but wrath—if in thy heart thou dost confess that thou deservest condemnation, thou art the kind of man that Christ came to save, thou art the sort of man that God chose from before the foundation of the world, and thou mayest, without any hesitancy, come and put thy trust in Jesus, who is the sinner's Saviour. Believing in him, thou shalt receive immediate salvation.

I will not give you further instances and particulars; for time would fail me. I leave you just there with this advice: it is not yours to raise questions, but submissively to say, "Truth, Lord." Then it is your wisdom to set one truth over against another, till you have learned the better plan of finding light in the dark truth itself. God help thee to fetch honey from the rock and oil out of the flinty rock, by a simple and unquestioning faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. Thirdly, in any case, whatever Christ saith or doth not say, HAVE THOU FAITH IN HIM. Look at this woman's faith and try to copy it. It grew in its apprehension of Jesus.

First, he is *the Lord of mercy:* she cried, "Have mercy on me." Have faith enough, dear hearer, to believe that thou needest mercy.

Mercy is not for the meritorious: the claim of the meritorious is for justice, not for mercy. The guilty need and seek mercy; and only they. Believe that God delighteth in mercy, delighteth to give grace where it cannot be deserved, delighteth to forgive where there is no reason for forgiveness but his own goodness. Believe also that the Lord Jesus Christ whom we preach to you is the incarnation of mercy: his very existence is mercy to you, his every word means mercy; his life, his death, his intercession in heaven, all mean mercy, mercy, mercy, nothing but mercy. You need divine mercy, and Jesus is the embodiment of divine mercy—he is the Saviour for you. Believe in him, and the mercy of God is yours.

This woman also called him *Son of David,* in which she recognized his manhood and his kingship towards man. Think of Jesus Christ as God over all, blessed for ever, he that made the heaven and the earth, and upholdeth all things by the word of his power. Know that he became man, veiling his Godhead in this poor clay of ours: he hung as a babe upon a woman's breast, he sat as a weary man upon the curb of a well, he died with malefactors on the cross; and all this out of love to man. Can you not trust this Son of David? David was very popular because he went in and out amongst the people, and proved himself the people's king. Jesus is such. David gathered to him a company of men who were greatly attached to him, because when they came to him they were a broken-down crew; they were in debt, and discontented; all the outcasts from Saul's dominions came around David, and he became a captain to them. My Lord Jesus Christ is one chosen out of the people, chosen by God on purpose to be a brother to us, a brother born for adversity, a brother who has come to associate with us, despite our meanness and misery. He is the friend of men and women who are ruined by their guilt and sin. "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Jesus is the willing leader of a people sinful and defiled, whom he raises to justification and holiness, and makes to dwell with himself in glory for ever. Oh, will you not trust such a Saviour as this? My Lord did not come into the world to save superior people, who think themselves born saints. I say again, you may sit upon thrones till you and your thrones go down to perdition. But Jesus came to save the lost, the ruined, the guilty, the unworthy. Let such come clustering round him like the bees around the queen bee, for he is ordained on purpose to collect the Lord's chosen ones, as it is written, "Unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

This believing woman might have been cheered by another theme. Our Lord said to his disciples, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." "Ah!" thinks she, "he is a shepherd for lost sheep. Whatever his flock may be, *he is a shepherd*, and he has bowels of compassion for poor lost sheep: surely he is one to whom I may look with confidence." Ah, dear hearer! my Lord Jesus Christ is a shepherd by office and by nature, and if you are a lost sheep this is good tidings for you. There is a holy instinct in him which makes him gather the lambs with his arms, and causes him to search out the lost ones, who were scattered in the cloudy and dark day. Trust him to seek you; yea, come to him now, and leave yourselves with him.

Further than that, this woman had a faith in Christ that he was like *a great householder*. She seems to say, "Those disciples are children who sit at table, and he feeds them on the bread of his love. He makes for them so great a feast, and he gives to them so much food, that if my daughter were healed, it would be a great and blessed thing to me, but to him it would be no more than if a crumb fell under the table, and a dog fed thereon." She does not ask to have a crumb thrown to her, but only to be allowed to pick up a crumb that has fallen from the table. She asks not even for a crumb which the Lord may drop; but for one which the children have let fall: they are generally great crumb-makers. I notice in the Greek, that as the word for "dogs," is "little dogs"; so the word rendered "crumbs" is "little crumbs"—small, inconsidered morsels, which fall by accident. Think of this faith. To have the devil cast out of her daughter was the greatest thing she could imagine; and yet she had such a belief in the greatness of the Lord Christ, that she thought it would be no more to him to make her daughter well than for a great housekeeper to let a poor little dog eat a tiny crumb that had been dropped by a child. Is not that splendid faith? And now, canst thou exercise such a faith? Canst thou believe it—thou, a condemned, lost sinner—that if God save thee it will be the greatest wonder that ever was; and yet that to Jesus, who made himself a sacrifice for sin, it will be no more than if this day thy dog or thy cat should eat a tiny morsel that one of thy children had dropped from the table? Canst thou think Jesus to be so great, that what is heaven to thee will be only a crumb to him? Canst thou believe that he can save thee readily? As for me, I believe my Lord to be such a Saviour that I can trust my soul wholly to him, and that without difficulty. And I will tell you something else: if I had all your souls in my body, I would trust them all to Jesus. Yea, and if I had a million sinful souls of my own, I would freely trust the Lord Christ with the whole of them, and I would say, "I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." Do not suppose that I speak thus because I am conscious of any goodness of my own. Far from it: my trust is in no degree in myself, or anything I can do or be. If I were good I could not trust in Jesus. Why should I? I should trust myself. But because I have nothing of my own, I am obliged to live by trust, and I am rejoiced that I may do so. My Lord gives me unlimited credit at the Bank of Faith. I am very deeply in debt to him, and I am resolved to be more indebted still. Sinner as I am, if I were a million times as sinful as I am, and then had a million souls each one a million times more sinful than my own, I would still trust his atoning blood to cleanse me, and himself to save me. By thine agony and bloody sweat, by thy cross and passion, by thy precious death and burial, by thy glorious resurrection and ascension, by thine intercession for the guilty at the right hand of God, O Christ, I feel that I can repose in thee. May you come to this point, all of you; that Jesus is abundantly able to save.

You have been a thief, have you? The last person that was in our Lord's near company on earth was the dying thief. "Oh!" but you

say, "I have been foul in life; I have defiled myself with all manner of evil." But those with whom he associates now were all of them once unclean; for they confess that they have washed their robes, and made them white in his blood. Their robes were once so foul that nothing but his heart's blood could have made them white. Jesus is a great Saviour, greater than my tongue can tell. I fail to speak his worth, and I should still fail to do so, even if I could speak heaven in every word, and express infinity in every sentence. Not all the tongues of men or of angels can fully set forth the greatness of the grace of our Redeemer. Trust him! Are you afraid to trust him? Then make a dash for it. Venture to do so.

"Venture on him, venture wholly;
Let no other trust intrude."

"Look unto me," saith he, "and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." Look! Look now! Look to him alone; and as you look to him with the look of faith he will look on you with loving acceptance, and say, "Great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Thou shalt be saved at this very hour; and though thou camest into this house of prayer grievously vexed with a devil, thou shalt go out at peace with God, and as restful as an angel. God grant thee this boon, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xv. 21—34.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—34 (Vers. II), 622, 624.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 16TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."—Hebrews iii. 13.

SIN is the greatest evil in the universe. It is the parent of all other ills. All manner of evils draw their bitterness from this fount of wormwood and gall. If a man had every possession mortal could desire, sin could turn every blessing into a curse; and, on the other hand, if a man had nothing for his inheritance but suffering, but stood clear from all sin, his afflictions, his losses, his deprivations might each one be a gain to him. We ought not to pray so much against sickness, or trial, or temptation, or even against death itself, as against sin. Satan himself cannot hurt us, except as he is armed with the poisoned arrows of sin. Lord, keep us from *sin*. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." There is no evil like the evil of sin: deliver us from it, O Lord!

Alas! we are sadly prone to sin, and evil has great influence over us. When I say this, I refer not only to those who are "dead in trespasses and sins," in whom sin is the great reigning power, for they are the servants of sin; but I refer also to the people of God. Even we that have been born again, and are, in a measure, sanctified by the Spirit of God; even we, I say, have a fleshly nature, whose tendencies are evil, whose desires draw towards sin. How soon we slip! How much we need to be held up! How ought we daily to cry for grace, lest we also should be "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"!

Upon that subject I am going to speak this morning, dwelling, for the most part, upon "the deceitfulness of sin." To God's people this is a very important matter; for in the deceit of sin lies our main danger. If sin comes to us as sin, we are swift to hate it, and strong to repel it, by the grace of God. When we are walking with God, we only need to know that an action is forbidden, and straightway we avoid it; we shun the evil thing when it is plainly evil. But sin puts on another dress, and comes to us speaking a language which is not

its own; and so, even those who would avoid sin as sin, may, by degrees, be tempted to evil, and deluded into wrong. It is well when sin carries its black flag at the mast-head; for then we know what we are dealing with. The deceitfulness of sin is most ruinous. We have grave cause to watch and pray against secret sins, veiled sins, popular sins, fascinating sins, deceitful sins. May God grant that the words which I may now utter may set us on our watch-tower, and excite all our faculties to enquire diligently, lest we be "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Let us come at once to the centre of our subject. Our first head is, *sin has a singular power to deceive;* secondly, *its deceivableness has a hardening influence upon the soul*—we may grow "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"; and, therefore, thirdly, *there is great need that this be fought against.* We must strive against our cunning enemy, and resist him in many ways, one of which is mentioned in the text: "Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day." May the Holy Ghost put power into our meditation at this hour!

I. First, then, SIN HAS A SINGULAR POWER TO DECEIVE. We have only to look back to the beginning of our race to be sure of this. Eve, in the garden, was pure, intelligent, and filled with good dispositions: her faculties were well balanced, for no original sin or natural depravity had put her mind out of order. Yet that lovely woman, without a taint upon her heart or will, perfect as she came from her Maker's hand, was overcome by Satan, who embodied in himself the deceitfulness of sin. The serpent played his part right cunningly with the woman, and soon withdrew her from her loyal obedience to the Lord God. She began to question, to parley, to argue with rebellious suggestions, and after a while she put forth her hand, and she took of the fruit which had been forbidden, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat. If man in his perfectness was so readily deceived by sin, what think you of yourself, fallen and inclined to evil as you are? Will not sin soon deceive you? I will even go further back than the garden; for the serpent who was the instrument of evil in the garden, was once an angel of God. Lucifer, the light-bearer, son of the morning, once stood high in the hierarchy of spirits; but sin entered into his heart, and the sublime angel became a loathsome fiend. Lucifer became Satan, as prompt for evil as once he had been swift for good. If sin overcame angels, can *we* fight with it? If sin entangled in its thrice-accursed net even the pure spirits of heaven, what, think ye, sons and daughters of fallen parents, will not ye soon be deceived by it, unless the grace of God shall make you wise unto salvation? Since your hearts are deceitful, and sin is deceitful, you are in peril indeed.

The deceitfulness of sin will be seen in several points, to which I call your attention.

Its deceit may be seen in the manner of its approaches to us. Sin does not uncover all its hideousness, nor reveal its horrible consequences; but it comes to us in a very subtle way, offering us advantage. Intellectually, it comes with a question, or an inquiry. Ought we not to question and to enquire? Are we to receive everything implicitly? The question is, however, full often the thin end of the wedge, which

Satan drives home in the form of carnal wisdom, doubt, infidelity, and practical atheism. The practice of sin may be encouraged by a doubt as to its penalty. "Yea, hath God said?" is the speculative question which is meant to undermine the foundations of godly fear in the heart. How tiny a drop of sinful distrust of God's Word will poison all the thoughts of the soul!

Sin frequently comes as a bare suggestion, or an imagination; an airy thing, spun of such stuff as dreams are made of. You do not think of committing the fault, nor even of talking of it; but you think of it pleasantly, and view it as a thing bright and lustrous to the imagination. The thought fascinates, and then the spell of evil begins its deadly work: thought condenses into desire, and desire grows to purpose, and purpose ripens into act. So slyly doth sin come into the soul, that it is there before we are aware of it.

I have known a sin insinuate itself by the way of the repulsion of another sin. A man has wasted his substance in profligacy; and by way of repentance, in after days he becomes a miser—greedy, wretched, living only for himself and his hoard. So have I seen the publican reform and develop a Pharisee. The pendulum went sadly far in this direction, and now, to make amends, it swings too far the other way. The shivering fit follows upon the burning heat—it is but the same fever of sin in diverse phases. A man will fly from pride to meanness, from moroseness to jollity, from obstinacy to laxity. Thus the shutting of one gate may open another, and one sin may crawl in as another creeps out. You set all your guards to keep the northern border, and the enemies come up from the south, taking you at unawares. You pursue a virtue till you hurry into a vice, and shun one evil so much that you fall into a worse.

Sin has a way of adapting itself to us and to our circumstances. One man is of a sanguine temperament, and he is tempted to speculate, to gamble, and ultimately to become dishonest. Another man is of a sober frame of mind, and he is tempted to be melancholy, disputatious, peevish, rebellious against God. To the young man sin will come with fire for passions, which are all too ready to blaze; to the old man sin will come with the chill frost of parsimony, or the frost of sloth, or the canker of care. Sin's quiver has an arrow for the rich, and a dart for the poor: it has one form of poison for the prosperous, and another for the unsuccessful. This master fisherman in the sea of life does not use the same bait for all sorts of fish; but he knows the creatures he would capture. If sin find thee poor as an owlet, it will tempt thee to envy, or to steal, or to doubt God, or to follow crooked ways of gain. If sin find thee abounding in riches, it will follow quite another tack, and lure thee on to self-indulgence, or to pride, or worldly fashion. Satan knows more about us than we know about ourselves: he knows our raw places, and our weak points, and in what joint there was a breakage in our youth. Sin, like the north wind, finds out every cranny in the house of manhood, and comes whistling in where we fondly dreamed that we were quite screened from its intrusion. Sin creeps towards us as a lion stealthily draws near to his prey, or as the Red Indian creeps towards his victim without sound of foot or stir of twig. Beware of the sin which, like Agag, comes delicately. Watch well against the

temptation whose words are smoother than butter, but inwardly they are drawn swords.

Next, *sin is deceitful in its object*, for the object which it puts before us is not that which is its actual result. We are not tempted to provoke our Maker, or wilfully cast off the authority of righteousness. We are not invited to do these things for their own sake. No, no; we are moved to do evil under the idea that some present good will come of it. The man thinks, when he yields to sin, that he shall enjoy an additional pleasure, or shall gain an extra profit, or at least shall avoid a measure of evil, and escape from something which he dreads. He does the wrong for the sake of what he hopes will come of it. In brief, he does evil that good may come. Thus, the seeming good is dangled before the short-sighted creature, man, as the bait before the fish. In every case, this object is a piece of deceit. Evil does not lead to good, nor sin promote our real profit: we are fooled if we think so. Yet, in most cases, the man does not commit the sin with the design of breaking the law of God, and defying his Maker, but because he fancies that something is to be gained; and, in his judgment, he better understands what is good for him even than the Lord God, by whose wisdom he ought to be guided. Just as in the case of the old serpent, the argument is—God refuses you that which would be for your advantage, and you will be wise to take it. The arch-deceiver insinuated that God knew that if Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit their eyes would be opened, and they would be as gods; and therefore, to keep them under subjection, he denied them the charming fruit. Perhaps Milton's idea is right. "See what this fruit has done for me," says the serpent; "I, a mere reptile, am now able to speak and argue like a man. Go, take the fruit, and you, as men, will rise to the rank of God." Thus are we lured and bird-limed like the silly fowls of the air. The object set before us is delusive: the reward of sin may glitter, but it is not gold, and yet as gold it thrusts itself upon our erring judgment. This deceitfulness of sin is everywhere present: the street, the house, the private room, all come to be enchanted ground unless we dwell in God. Are we not often caused to think that we could make at least a little gain, or do a measure of extra good, if we might just to a small degree quit the strait and narrow way? This is falsehood, base as hell.

Sin is deceitful, next, in the names it wears. It is very apt to change its title: it seldom cares for its own true description. Fine words are often used to cover foul deeds. We read, at times, in the newspapers, of gentlemen who have an alias, or possibly half-a-dozen: in such cases, there is always a reason for it. Sin has many names by which it would disguise its real character. In his "Holy War," Mr. Bunyan tells us that Covetousness called himself by the name of Prudent-thrifty; Lasciviousness was named Harmless-mirth; and Anger was known as Good-zeal. Nowadays, anger is known as "proper spirit," and infidelity is "Advanced Theology." Almost every sin, nowadays, has a pretty name to be called by on Sundays, and silver slippers to wear in fine society. The paint-brush and the powder-box are much used upon the wrinkled countenance of sin, to make it look

fair and beautiful. The fig-leaf is not only worn on the man's body; but sin itself puts on the apron. To hide the nakedness of sin is the great desire of Satan; for thus he hopes that even the better sort may fall in love with a decent evil, though they might have shunned an odious transgression. Alas, how sadly prone are men to call things by false names! Even those who profess to be godly men, when they are indulging sin, will speak of it as though it were no raven, black as night, but a dove, with its wings covered with silver. I knew one who often drank to excess; but he spoke of himself as obliged to "take a little for his health." He was not drunk, but excited; and if he shouted uproariously, it was caused by his convivial temperament. This dear innocent only took "a glass" or a "drop"; and yet one might not be further off the truth if he described him as taking a barrel or a hogshead. Diminutives are names of endearment, and men would not talk of their sins as such little things, unless they loved them dearly. To-day, "worldliness" is "being abreast of the age"; false doctrine is described as "advanced thought." Indifference to truth is liberality, heresy is breadth of view. Yet, names do not alter things. Call garlic perfume, and it remains a rank odour. Style the fiend an angel of light, and he is none the less a devil. Sin, call it by what names you may, is still evil, only evil, and that continually. Hear how our God cries concerning it: "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate"! Lord, save us from the wolf in the sheep's clothing! May we have grace to see through the mask of sin, detect its loathsome face, and turn from it with full purpose of heart!

Sin also shows its special deceitfulness in the arguments which it uses with men. Have you never heard its voice whispering to you, "Do not make much ado about nothing. Is it not a little one? There is no need to boggle over so small a matter as this. It is not right, but still it is a mere trifle, unworthy of notice. Do it! do it!" My friends, can there be such a thing as a small sin? The point of the rapier is small, and for that reason the more deadly. That which grieves the Lord cannot be a little evil. To pluck the fruit from the forbidden tree was of all actions the simplest, yet brought it death into the world, with all its train of woe; and that which seems most trifling may have infinite consequences following in its track.

Then will sin raise the question, and say, "Is this really wrong? May we not be too precise? Are not the times changed? Do not circumstances alter the command?" Sin is great at raising difficult points of casuistry. "Are there not some points of view in which this act may be allowable, though from more usual points of view it must certainly be regarded as an unhallowed thing?" He that wills to do wrong is eager to find a loophole for himself. He that has begun to seek an excuse is on the border-land of the enemy. He that is loyal to the core and true to his King in everything, makes short work of questions; for when he is not sure that a thing is right he lets it alone.

The deceitfulness of sin creates in the mind a tendency to do evil because others have done so. We have known people so eager to excuse sin that they cry, "Look at Noah, at David, at Peter," and so on; as if the faults of others were an excuse for them. It is true that

these men went wrong, and were restored; but yet they suffered greatly. That is a vile mind which eats up the sins of God's people as men eat bread. Arguing for the indulgence of sin because of the failings of good men, is not only folly, but wickedness. What if a man was saved who had taken poison, shall I therefore drink the deadly draught? Some time ago, a person sought to blow out his brains with a pistol; he still lives; and shall I therefore put a revolver to my forehead? Yet such detestable arguments often suffice to mislead men, through the deceitfulness of sin. Beware of the witchery of sin!

With feeble minds the argument is, "Beware lest you be singular. As well be out of the world as out of the fashion. When you are at Rome you must do as Rome does." Weak minds are plentiful, and to these, to be thought singular and odd, is a thing to be dreaded and shunned: they must be in the swim, though the water should be of the foulest. To them it would be next door to a crime or a calamity to be out of the fashion. To some of us this is no temptation, for we prefer to quit the crowd and walk alone; but to the bulk of people this is a mighty argument, and yet a most deceitful one. He who has God on his side is in the majority; and if all the world go with us on the wrong road it is not a whit the safer.

Sin has often whispered in the vain minds of men, "This action might be very wrong for other people, but it will not be evil in you. Under your present circumstances, you may take leave to overlook the command of God. True, you would severely condemn such a sin in another; but in yourself it is quite another matter. Things must be left to your superior discretion. You who do so much that is good, and are such a remarkable person, you may venture where others should not." Sin will also plead with you that your circumstances are such that they furnish you with an excellent justification: you cannot do otherwise than make an exception to the general rule, under the singular conditions in which you are now placed. It tempts you to put forth your hand unto iniquity, arguing that it is the quick way, and the only way, out of your present difficulties. This is specious reasoning: yet are men foolish enough to be swayed by it.

Sin will also flatter a man with the notion that he can go just so far, and no farther, and retreat with ease. He can tread the verge of crime, and yet be innocent. Another person would be in great danger; but this self-satisfied fool thinks that he has such power over himself, and that he is so intelligent, and so experienced, that he can stop at a safe point. This moth can play with the candle, and not singe its wings. This child can put its finger between the bars, and yet never burn himself. I know you, my self-contained friend, and I know your boast that you can stand on the edge of a cliff, and look down upon the foaming sea, and while other people's heads grow giddy, your brain is clear, and your foot is firm. You may try the experiment once too often. The deceivableness of sin is such that it makes those most secure who are most in peril. Oh, for grace to watch and pray, lest we also become "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"!

This deceivableness is further seen in the excuses which it frames

afterwards. It needs a great general to cover a retreat, and conduct it to a safe conclusion. Sin knows how to furnish a rear-guard for itself, lest it be assailed by the troops of repentance. To screen the conscience from regret is one of the efforts of deceitful sin. "Ah!" says the man to himself, "I did wrong; but what can you expect of poor flesh and blood?" To hear him talk, you would think him a pitiable victim, rather than a blameworthy offender. With a sham tear in his eye, he lays this flattering unction to his soul—that he is weak, but not wicked; he was compelled to do wrong; he would not have thought of it had there not been a necessity. Beware of aptness in the making of an excuse, and above all, beware of casting the blame of sin on providence, or on God.

Sin will also add, "And, after all, though you were wrong, yet you were not so bad as you might have been; and, considering the temptation, you may wonder at your own moderation in transgression. On the whole, you have behaved better than others would have done." Thus the sinner will weave a garment out of the cobwebs of his sins. Self-righteousness is poor stuff when it can be fashioned even out of our faults. Such is the deceivableness of sin, that it makes itself out to be praiseworthy.

Then sin will suggest, "Well, you can soon make up for lost time. Live nearer to God, and be more useful! and then your little divergence will soon be made up." It even ventures coarsely to propose a price for pardon. "Give something extra to the good cause, and make amends for offences." The old Popish idea of purchasing pardon by some extra piece of religion comes up in many forms.

"Ah!" you say, "surely nobody hears such deceitful talk!" Has sin never whispered all this to you? If it has not, then it has taken another way of deceiving you; but deceive you it will, unless Almighty grace shall keep you ever on the watch against its devices.

The deceitfulness of sin is seen again in its promises; for we shall not go far into sin without finding out how greatly it lies unto us. It promises liberty, and the man who yields to it becomes the veriest slave. It promises light, and the man gives up the old faith to go after the new light, and before long the darkness thickens about him into sevenfold midnight. Sin promises elevation of mind and spirit, and before long the wretch is worldly, pleasure-loving, grovelling, superstitious. Sin keeps none of its promises, save only to the ear. Holiness is truth; but sin is a lie. Sin is false through and through: it promises pleasure, and it leads to misery; it feigns a heaven, but inflicts a real hell.

Once more, *sin is deceitful in the influence which it carries with it*. At first sin cultivates a free and easy bearing, and it says to the sinner, "Don't think. Leave consideration to older heads.

> 'I count it one of the wisest things
> To drive dull care away.'

The guilty one goes on day after day without looking to his way. His happiness lies in carelessness. He hurries downward to destruction, and it is enough to him that the road is easy. With a laugh and a joke, he puts off serious things till to-morrow. He is a free-thinker,

and, to a large extent, a free actor, too: those who are near him often find him making too free. Yes, but he is being deceived, and by-and-by, when conscience wakes up, he will find it so. Out of his own mouth will come the death-warrant of his jollity. In those more serious days, what does sin say?—"You have provoked the Spirit of God, and there is no mercy for you. Do not listen to the preacher of the gospel, it is impossible that you should be forgiven. Your case is hopeless; you are finally condemned, and there is no changing the verdict. As for the promises of God, they are not for such a sinner as you are; you are given up to despair, and you will, without doubt, perish everlastingly." This is the opposite pole of sin's deceiving: for, though it has changed sides, it is still deceiving. Despair is as much a sin as profanity: to doubt God is as truly a crime as to take pleasure in uncleanness. Thus will sin, by any means, by all means, endeavour to keep men under its tyranny, so as to work their ruin. Let no man in this place think that he cannot be deceived; he is already deluded by his pride. Let no woman dream that she has come to such a state of perfection that she cannot be deluded by sin: she is even now in imminent peril. We have a cunning enemy, and we have no wit of our own wherewith to match the subtlety of the old serpent, and the deceitfulness of sin. Unless we call in the help of him who is "the Wisdom of God," we shall be led as an ox to the slaughter, and perish in our folly.

II. I want you, in the second place, to notice very carefully that THIS DECEITFULNESS HAS A HARDENING POWER OVER THE HEART: "Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." How does that come about?

Partly through *our familiarity with sin.* We may look at hateful sin till we love it. It has the eye of a basilisk, and its gaze is fascinating. At first you are shocked by sin; but if you see it every day it will cease to distress you. Persons who have never heard profane language are greatly grieved as they go down the streets of London; and yet even good people who live in certain localities come to hear it without horror. This is one of the sad influences of sin, it makes the heart horny by contact with it. The lion in the fable alarmed the fox when first he saw him, but soon he ceased to tremble at him, and at last made him his companion. Familiarity with sin makes the conscience dull, and at length deadens sensibility.

Security in wrong-doing leads also to this kind of hardening. A man has been dishonest: he is found out, and he suffers for it. I could almost thank God, for now he may cease from his evil course. But one of the greatest curses that can happen to a man is for him to do wrong with impunity: he will do it again, and again, and again, and he will proceed from bad to worse. I am always glad when I hear of a young gambler whose pocket is cleaned out at his first venture: if he has any wit he will quit the way of destruction; at least, we hope he will. But if he gains at first he will stake more and more, and become a confirmed gamester. It is just so with sin: its deceitfulness is assisted by a man's being able to go a little further and a little further without any great hurt appearing to come of it: for the heart grows used to the increasing heat, and is hardened to it, till he can live

in a furnace heated seven times hotter by sin. Sinners descend by an inclined plane till they find themselves far down in the abyss, and think it impossible to rise out of it.

Then there follows on the back of this insensibility to sin *an insensibility to the gospel.* I think I could mention some who come here who once trembled under the Word; but they do not tremble now. They come still, because they like to pick out the few smart bits the preacher may say, or the witty anecdotes that he may let fall; but nothing touches their conscience or arouses their fears now. If there be a sermon that is likely to disturb them, they play the part of the adder, which will not hear. I think with sadness of one, who, in reply to the remark, "What a terrible sermon we had this morning!" answered, "I never pay any attention to that kind of thing. I only listen to him when he is comforting us." Hypocrites get into such a condition at last, that if all the apostles were to preach to them, and Jesus himself were to denounce the judgments of God, they would simply make an observation upon the style of the address, or remark that it was a very searching discourse; but as for being themselves moved, they are so "past feeling" that nothing comes home to them. The devils believe and tremble; but these profess to believe every truth, but trembling is not for them.

In time comes in the help of *unbelief.* When a man begins to doubt his Bible, to doubt the atonement, to doubt the wrath to come, and so on, there is generally a cause for it; and that cause is not always intellectual, but moral and spiritual. "There is something rotten in the state of Denmark"; I mean something rotten in the heart, and this makes something rotten in the head. Very naturally a man does not like that truth which does not like him. That which condemns him he tries to condemn. A truth makes him uneasy, and so he tries to doubt it, and the tone of society soon helps him to discover a stale objection which will answer his turn, and enable him to set up in business as an unbeliever. Then he ceases to feel the preaching; for, as a rule, we only feel under the gospel in proportion as we believe it to be true; and if we persuade ourselves that it is all a myth, or a fiction, we have made a pillow for our guilty heads.

One of the worst points about hardening in sin is *companionship* in it. Evil men seek other evil men to be their associates. Oh, how many are ruined by company! We do not wonder that they get no good on Sundays, when we know where they spend their week evenings. Who are their chosen companions when they take their pleasure? Many a man will do, when connected with others, what he himself would never have thought of doing. Inasmuch as others are of the same mind, he joins hand in hand with them, and encourages himself in evil. The daring, the looseness, the profanity, the infidelity of abler persons tempt the weak-minded to venture where else they would have been afraid to go. So the deceivableness of sin which led the man to seek evil company leads to the further hardening of his heart by that company.

O sirs! your hearts are every day either softening or hardening. The sun that shines with vehement heat melts the wax, but it, at the same time, hardens the clay. The effect of the gospel is always

present in some degree: it is a savour of life unto life, or else a savour of death unto death, to all who hear it. You cannot listen to my plain rebukes and earnest warnings without growing worse, if you do not grow better. Pray God to give you a lively conscience; and when you have it, do nothing to deaden it. It is much better even to be morbidly sensitive, and fear that you are wrong when you are right, than to grow careless as to whether you are right or wrong, and so to go on blindly till you fall into the ditch of open sin. "Do professing Christians ever do this?" Do they not do it? Is not this the heart-break of pastors, the dishonour of the church, the crucifying of our Lord afresh? O Lord, preserve us from it, lest any one of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!

III. Now I conclude by a practical observation, that THIS DECEITFULNESS OF SIN, AND THIS TENDENCY TO BECOME HARDENED, NEED TO BE FOUGHT AGAINST. How is it to be done? I will not keep to my text just now, but enlarge the scope of my discourse by taking in the context.

The way to keep from hardness of heart, and from the deceitfulness of sin, is *to believe*. We read, "To whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Believe!—faith *has* saved you. Believe! faith *will* save you! Believe!—faith has brought you to Christ. Believe!—it will keep you to Christ. Believe against the present temptation. Believe against all future deceitfulness of sin. You shall find that, just in proportion as faith grows strong, the deceit of sin will be baffled. Under the strong light of a living faith you see through the sinful imposture, and you no longer put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; but under the half light, the twilight, the darkness of a questioning, half-hearted faith, you cannot see the true colour of an act, and you are easily deceived. Believe thou in the living God, and in his righteousness, and in thy obligation to serve him—then sin will appear exceeding sinful. Believe in Christ, who took thy sin, and bare it in his own body on the tree—then sin will be seen in its black colours. Believe in the Holy Ghost, by whose power thou canst be delivered from the deceitfulness of sin; and as thou believest, so shall it be unto thee, and thou shalt stand fast where the half-believer slides.

The next advice I would give is this—if you would be saved from the deceitfulness of sin *confess it* honestly before God. It is necessary to lay bare your heart before the living God. Though sin call itself by another name, do thou call it by its right name. When thou hast sinned, make no excuses for thyself; but with weeping and lamentation cry, "Lord, I have sinned." Tell the Lord all the evil connected with your transgression, and try therein to spy out and humbly learn the villany of thy heart, the falseness of thy nature, the crookedness of thy disposition, the loathsomeness of thy corruptions. Pray that sin may appear sin: it cannot appear in a worse light. Thus thou shalt not so readily be caught in its traps and lures. It lays its snares in the darkness: keep thine eyes open. It digs its pits, and covers them most cunningly: look before thou puttest thy foot down. Tread very cautiously; for thy way is full of pitfalls.

When thou hast sinned, then confess the great evil of thy wickedness; for this humble penitence will be not only thy way to pardon, but to future purity. Oh, that the Spirit of God may teach thee this!

Again, *cultivate great tenderness of heart.* Do not believe that to grieve over sin is lowering to manhood; indulge thyself largely in sweet repentance. Do not think that to yield to the power of the Word, and to be greatly affected by it, shows thee to be weak; think rather that this is an infirmity in which thy strength lies. As for myself, I would be swayed by the Word of God as the ripe corn is swayed by the summer wind. I would be by God's Spirit as readily moved as the leaves of the aspen by the breeze. I would be sensitive to the gentlest breath of my Lord. God grant that we may have a conscience quick as the apple of an eye! A conscience seared as with a hot iron is the sure prelude of destruction. God save us from a heart over which sin has cast a coat of callous insensibility!

But now the text itself says, "*Exhort one another daily*"; from which I gather two lessons. First, hear exhortation from others; and, secondly, practise exhortation to others. I have known people of this kind, that if a word is spoken to them, however gently, as to a wrong which they are doing, their temper is up in a moment. Who are they that they should be spoken to? Dear friend, who are you that you should *not* be spoken to? Are you such an off-cast and such an outcast that your Christian brethren must give you up? Surely you do not want to bear that character. I have even known persons take offence because the word has been spoken from the pulpit too pointedly. This is to take offence where we ought to show gratitude. "Oh," says one, "I will never hear that man again! He is too personal." What kind of a man would you like to hear? Will you give your ear to one who will please you to your ruin, and flatter you to your destruction? Surely, you are not so foolish? Do you choose that kind of doctor who never tells you the truth about your bodily health? Do you trust one who falsely assured you that there was nothing the matter with you when all the while a terrible disease was folding its cruel arms about you? Your doctor would not hurt your feelings. He washes his hands with invisible soap, and gives you a portion of the same. He will send you just a little pill, and you will be all right. He would not have you think of that painful operation which a certain surgeon has suggested to you. He smirks and smiles, until, after a little while of him and his pills, you say to yourself, "I am getting worse and worse, and yet he smiles, and smiles, and flatters and soothes me. I will have done with him and his little pills, and go to one who will examine me honestly, and treat me properly. He may take his soap and his smile elsewhere." O sirs, believe me, I would think it a waste of time, nay, a crime like that of murder, to stand here and prophesy smooth things to you. We must all learn to hear what we do not like. The question is not, "Is it pleasant?" but, "Is it true?"

We ought to be able to take a loving exhortation from our brethren and sisters. We must do so if we are to be preserved from the deceitfulness of sin. Another eye may see for me what I cannot see for myself. Reproofs should be given with great tenderness; but even if they wound us, we must bear them. "Let the righteous smite

me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil." Let us be thankful that some saints love us well enough to give themselves the pain and trouble of exhorting us.

And then let us endeavour, if the Lord is keeping us by his grace, to "exhort one another daily." We are not to scold one another daily, nor to suspect one another daily, nor to pick holes in one anothers' coats daily; but when we see a manifest fault in a brother, we are bound to tell him of it in love; and when we do not see any fault of commission, but the brother is evidently growing lax and cold, it is well to stir him up to greater zeal by a loving exhortation. Wisely said, a word may save a soul from declension and sin. A good fire may need a little stirring. The best of believers may grow better by the communications of his friends. Alas! we do not care enough for the souls of our brethren. If we thought more carefully of others, we should probably think more carefully about ourselves. "Exhort one another daily."

Watch over your own children, your wife, your husband, and then do not forget your neighbours and fellow-workmen. Cry to God to give us union of spirit with all the Lord's chosen, and may that union of spirit be a living and loving one! We would not be frozen together in chill propriety, but we would be welded together at a white heat of loving earnestness, so as to be truly one in Christ Jesus. Let us take for our motto, "One and all." Maintaining individuality by each one watching against personal sin, and merging individuality in the commonwealth of saints by each one labouring for the sanctification of his brother.

But, oh, dear friends, after all that I have said, he is well kept whom the Lord keepeth. Commit yourselves unto the Lord, the Holy Spirit, who is able to keep you from stumbling. Let us, by a renewed act of faith, hand ourselves over to the Lord Jesus, that he may save us. You that have never done so, I pray that you may be moved to it. You cannot keep yourselves. Up till now you may have been virtuous, sober, honest, respected, and beloved; but will it last? Take a policy of life assurance upon your moral character by going to Jesus himself, and asking him to renew you in heart and soul, by his Spirit, that you may be in Christ Jesus, and in him may abide for ever. If you have been greatly deceived by sin, yet come to Jesus now, who can undeceive you, and undo the damage you have suffered. Trust in him, who is the faithful and true Witness, to deliver you from all falsehood and sin, and to keep you true to the end. The Lord bless these words of mine, which, however feeble, have been earnestly meant for your good, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—916, 649, 619.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

TO THOSE WHO FEEL UNFIT FOR THE COMMUNION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the Lord. For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people."—2 Chronicles xxx. 17—20.

BRETHREN, *it should be much to our joy that we do not serve under the ceremonial law, nor live within the legal dispensation.* The legal economy exhibited to the people a multitude of types and figures, and consequently it laid down many rules and rituals; and these were enacted with such solemn and terrible penalties, that the people were in constant fear of offending, and found obedience irksome by reason of the weakness of their flesh and the unspirituality of their minds. As for our Lord Jesus, his yoke is easy, and his burden is light; but concerning the law, even Peter speaks of it as "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." We are now brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God, a liberty which those who had been in the bondage could best appreciate. Those who are still under legal restrictions feel the pressure of them when they see the liberty of others. Sitting at dinner with a Samaritan, who considered himself under the law of the Pentateuch, I noticed that the worthy man refused first one dish and then another, and at length he exclaimed, "*Moses very hard*"; evidently feeling that the limit upon his diet involved a good deal of self-denial. Some of us could cheerfully bear such small matters as abstinence from certain meats and drinks; but if we were surrounded with regulations and prescriptions entering into minute details, our life would be full of care, and we should feel ill at ease.

We have attained the liberty of the gospel, and we are not called upon to observe days, and months, and years; nor to border our garments with a certain colour, nor to trim our hair by rule; neither are we called to practise divers washings and purifyings, or to observe laws and regulations amounting to a continual round of rites. The "free Spirit" dwells in us: to us every place is hallowed; our religion is not of the

outward, and in the matter of meats we call nothing common or unclean. We have ordinances, it is true, but they are few and simple. They are but two, and each of them is instructive and easy. Baptism and the Supper of the Lord, which are for the Lord's people only, are easy of observance, and are for our help and comfort, but are by no means burdensome. These are not laid upon us as yokes, but given to us as privileges. Neither are they enforced by such a sentence as this: "The soul that forbeareth to keep the passover shall be cut off from among his people." Gospel ordinances are choice enjoyments, enjoined upon us by the loving rule of him whom we call Master and Lord. We accept them with joy and delight. In keeping these commandments there is great reward; but they are not presented to us as matters of servitude. In baptism we are made to see the burial of our Lord, and are helped to enter into spiritual fellowship with him therein: this is no burdensome ordinance, but a delight. The Lord's own Supper is a joyful festival, a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. All is joy and rest about these two ordinances. In enjoying them we feel that we are not under law, but under grace. I would not have you come to this table with the same trembling with which an Israelite ate the passover, or stand there as the Israelite did, with your loins girt, and your staff in your hand, eating in haste and apprehension. Nay, but you may sit at ease, or even recline, to express the rest which you enjoy at the Lord's table, and the close communion to which your Redeemer invites you. He has called you his friends, and he has honoured you to be his table companions, to sit and feast with him without reserve.

Lest liberty should degenerate into license, I am bound to remind you that *we are not left without command and direction.* The law of love is as binding on us as ever the law of works could have been. We are still called to obedience—the obedience of faith. A most strict but most happy service grows out of sonship, and no true son wishes to disown it. Should not the son honour his father? Does not the Lord himself say, "If I be a father, where is mine honour?" There is a service of which we read, that God spares such a one, "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." We are not under the law, but yet we are not without law to Christ; and concerning these ordinances which I have described as the privilege of the Lord's free men, there is an order of the Lord's house, and a discipline of his family, which must by no means be set aside by the loving child. We are not slaves fearing the lash, but we are sons who have a filial fear of grieving our heavenly Father.

The rules concerning the passover, and the right keeping of that high festival, were plain and definite, and to break them would have been a great offence to the God of Israel. These rules required a certain ceremonial cleanness on the part of all who partook of the Paschal lamb, and those who were defiled were kept back, so that they could not present the offering of the Lord in its appointed season. The sacred rite was not to be celebrated in heedless formalism, but with a careful cleansing out of the old leaven, that they might keep the feast aright. Now, concerning the memorial Supper of the Lord, we have no

rubric as to the bread or the wine, and no prescribed regulation as to posture or manner of procedure; and yet there are certain notes of guidance which we shall do well to follow with loving care.

For instance, when we come to this table of the Lord, it should not be without a preparedness of heart for it:—"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread, and drink of this cup." To come here irreverently, or with sinister motive, is to secure condemnation. To come here idly and carelessly is to lose the blessing. We should approach the table with hearts full of humility, gratitude, faith and expectation. We should receive the bread and wine with sincere longing after fellowship with Christ, tender love to his blessed person, and great joy in his finished work. If we do not thus partake of the sacred feast we shall miss its high design.

Yet, nevertheless, since I fear that there may be a certain number here to-night of the Lord's own people, who are in the condition of the multitude in Hezekiah's day, out of Manasseh and Zebulun, who have not sufficiently cleansed themselves after the manner of the purification of the sanctuary, I am anxious to show them how they may, even now, come to the divine ordinance, and realize profit from it, through the abundance of divine grace. God helping them, from this moment they may commence the needful preparedness of heart, and may speedily attain to it. So long as they do sincerely wish to meet with God, and to enjoy fellowship with him in his ordinance, there is no reason why they should retire from the assembly of the saints. They may begin, even now, I say, to make ready for this festival, and by divine grace they may so partake of this Supper, as to find in it all that their hearts desire. Our Lord is able, by his Spirit, to wash away their present defilement, and quicken them in mind and soul, so that they may both draw near to God with true heart, and discern the Lord's body with clear understanding. Such is the power of divine grace, that in a few moments the Lord can take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously. Our Great High-Priest, in the sacred authority of his divine office, can confer perfect cleansing, and give us full right to sit with the family, and partake of the lamb, and to rest beneath the roof, whose door has been marked for safety by the sprinkled blood.

I. So I will begin by saying, first, that as in the case before us in the text, so at this very time, THERE ARE SEASONS WHEN WE FEEL UNFIT FOR THE SACRED ORDINANCE OF THE LORD'S HOUSE.

It may be, that at this hour, there are many in the congregation who are not sanctified for the feast, and are not cleansed according to the due order. I speak not of you all, there are choice spirits in this place, who "walk in the light, as God is in the light," and have fellowship with God perpetually, so that the blood of Jesus cleanseth them from all sin. Why should we not all seek this acceptable preparedness, so that we may never be unfit for the most hallowed of all engagements? Ought we ever to be unfit for our Lord's table? Those two disciples who walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, talked together by the way. What a mercy it was that when their Lord asked them the manner of their communications, they could give this for their short answer: "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth"! Could you answer in such commendable style when you talk together? Consider,

my brethren, and answer to your consciences. It is well to be in such a condition, that in our common talk we are still keeping near to Jesus of Nazareth. The transition from our private dialogue to our Lord's actual company, and even to his being made known unto us in the breaking of bread, should be just like the gliding of a stream from one part of its channel to another, as it hastens its constant flow towards the boundless sea.

I fear that many of us have to complain of ourselves at times that we feel unfit for any holy thing, and most of all for the solemn engagements of this hallowed ordinance. Let us think of the ways in which the Israelites were rendered unfit for the passover, and see how far they tally with our unfitness for the Supper. *Some were kept away by defilement.* Read in Numbers, ninth chapter, sixth verse—"And there were certain men, who were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the passover on that day: and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day." For these men it was provided that they should keep the passover a month later, but they were to keep it without fail. Read the ninth and tenth verses—"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the Lord." I am afraid that you and I touch a great many dead bodies, and are often defiled thereby. You cannot go out to your business to-morrow morning but you will meet with that spiritual death which loads with corruption the air of "this present evil world." The dead in sin lie all around us; contact with their ways and motives, unless we are continually cleansed by divine grace, is defiling in many ways. Worse still, we cannot even stay at home without finding sin in our own dwellings. Yea, the mass of sin within your own selves, "the body of this death," as Paul calls it, is a constant source of defilement. Some quickness of temper, or levity of language, or excess of care, or thought of pride, or desire of covetousness, will occur. Oh, that we were delivered from the liability! These dead and corrupt things lie, not only in a corner, but on the table, in the bed, and everywhere, and when we touch them we are defiled. Whatever kind of sin it may be, whether of act, or of word, or of thought, or of imagination, or desire, it defiles more than most men imagine. Oh, that those who prate about perfection knew their own uncleanness! It were for their humbling, if they knew the sadly all-pervading influence of evil. How shall we pass through this huge charnel-house of a world, so full of everything that is corrupt, without becoming daily defiled? There are sins even in our holy things. Who shall deliver us?

A sense of defilement sadly tends to hinder fellowship. I know that if you are labouring to-night under a sense of sin, you do not feel the joyful liberty you would desire in coming to the hallowed table of your divine Lord. You long to have that sense of defilement sweetly removed by the application of the precious blood which cleanses from all sin. Thank God, that sacred purification is always available. You can at once wash and be clean, and know yourself to be "accepted in the Beloved." Thus may you eat the passover

even "as it is written"; but in any case, even if burdened with sin, the Lord does not forbid you to remember the death of his dear Son. Like the men of Ephraim, you shall find pardon, every one.

Peradventure, however, you are not conscious of having fallen into any known sin; but yet you feel like one who is not at home with God, but at some measure of a distance from him. You are out of your usual walk and rest. That calm and holy frame, that perfect peace which once you enjoyed from hour to hour, has gone from you. Thus you have about you, spiritually, the second disqualification for the passover. When a man was *on a journey afar off* he could not keep the passover. The passover was a household institution. It required a house wherein the lamb could be slain and prepared for eating, and a door whereof the lintel and two side posts could be sprinkled with blood; so that, when a man was moving rapidly from place to place, and had no house wherein to sojourn, he could not observe the holy festival. Even thus, when you and I are out of our usual abode in Christ Jesus, and are wandering in anxiety, and care, and doubt, we do not feel able to commune with our Lord as our hearts would desire. Brethren, do we not sometimes flit to and fro, like Noah's dove, finding no rest? How hard, then, is it to get into the full teaching of this holy Supper! It is well to sing, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee"; but till the prayer is answered, the ordinance is not enjoyed. The heart's blood of the Eucharist is nearness to God; and when we are afar off, it is a poor, dead ceremony. Its crown and joy is rest; and if we are tossed to and fro like the locust, and are like a rolling thing before the whirlwind, what use can we make of the mere form of the feast? Then are we very sadly disqualified for the sweets of communion, and feel disposed to go home and leave the holy feast to others. Yet such going home would be painful, and might even be injurious. O Lord, what shall thy servants do? We feel like men on a battle-field, and this ordinance is as green pastures, wherein the sheep do feed, and lie down, while the shepherd comes among them, manifesting himself to them. Gracious Lord, quiet the inward warfare, and make us to lie down, as saith the Psalmist, "He maketh me to lie down"; for if thou do not thus give us rest, we shall trample down even these holy pastures, and grieve thy Spirit.

Beloved friends, some of you have come hither to-night weary with the greatness of the way. You have been on a journey all this week, and you came to a halt on Saturday night afar off from that spirit of devotion which you should cultivate. Life of late has been full of troubles and perplexities. I pray the Lord to give you sweet rest at this moment, and bring you nigh to himself. "Cast your care on him; for he careth for you." Lay your burdens down at the foot of the great burden-bearer's cross. Be quiet even as a weaned child. At the same time, cry unto the Well-Beloved, "Draw me, we will run after thee"; and, or ever you are aware, your soul shall make you "like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." If you cannot come to the Beloved he can come to you, "leaping over the mountains, skipping upon the hills," and all your distance and disquiet will cease at once. So shall you keep the feast.

It may so happen, that up to this moment you have been in an evil case, *from unknown causes.* You cannot say how or why, but certainly it is not with you as in days past. Marring influences not mentioned in the book of Numbers, and possibly not mentionable at all—but none the less real for that—may have been keeping you from eating the spiritual passover to your heart's content, and may now tend to keep you from a truly happy approach to the Lord's table in spirit and in truth. Whatever the cause may be, I want you to confess it frankly, just as those men in Numbers confessed to Moses that they had touched a dead body. So far as you know the cause of defilement and division, own it. Look at the mischief as best you can, and mourn over it as far as it is sinful. Then carefully put it away from you, so far as it is a matter of care or distrust; and labour earnestly at this moment to prepare your heart to seek the Lord your God, even though you cannot quite feel that you are cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary: I mean, even though you do not feel in the best possible frame of mind for holy fellowship.

Some *supposed disqualifications* may be removed by an act of faith, or by a fuller knowledge. Do you fear to come because you have such little faith? May not the little children have their supper as well as the grown up sons? Are not these precisely the members of the family who most need to be fed and comforted? The utter absence of faith would shut you out, but not the feebleness of it. Come, thou little one: to thee I say, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without?"

Do you hesitate because your joy is not now overflowing? Is this a sufficient reason for refusing to obey the command, "This do in remembrance of me"? Were the twelve full of joy at the founding of this feast? Had they no questioning, saying, "Lord, is it I?" May not the feast itself furnish the joy? Is not the Lord of the feast your exceeding joy? If you cannot bring joy with you, come, that you may find it here.

Do you say, I am spiritually weak in all points? Again I ask, is that a reason why you should not feed on the best of food? It seems to me that it is a chief reason why you should feed often and heartily. "Eat ye that which is good" is a safe prescription for you, and a generous invitation from your Lord. Greatly you need it, freely take it. The supply of heavenly bread is intended for those who are faint. "He hath filled the hungry with good things." He will fill you.

Do you complain that you feel so useless? This is a deplorable fact, but what has it to do with the matter in hand? Are you to come to your Lord's table because you are useful to him? Nay, but that the Lord Jesus may be useful to you. Surely this is not a wage, but a provision of free grace. You do not bring the feast; your part is to receive it. So only can you become useful to Christ as Christ is abundantly useful to you. You cannot help to feed the multitude till your Lord first puts the bread into your hands. Come now and take what he has blessed.

I know, that for many reasons, the choicest saints at times deem themselves disqualified for this holy banquet, and I have sometimes thought that that is not altogether an ill feeling; at any rate, it is a symptom of many healthy things. If I felt myself worthy in any

sense, except the Scriptural one, I should infer from my self-satisfaction that I was unworthy. This table is no place for Pharisees. Where the Saviour presides, there may come none but sinners saved by his grace. If you have merits of your own which you can boast, and no sin to confess, you are not the man for whose salvation the Substitute has shed his precious blood. How could he atone for those who have no fault? But if you are a sinner, you are the sort of person whom Jesus came to save. Jesus is the sinner's friend. He will be yours if you go to him in that capacity. How can we commemorate the shedding of his blood unless we daily feel that we have solemn need to be washed therein? How can we remember him except as we see how we derive all from him? Jesus is never seen to be a full Christ except by those who feel their own emptiness apart from him. He is never prized at a true value by those who have a high esteem of themselves. A broken heart knows best his power to comfort. A bleeding heart sees best his power to heal. If you are sensible of your unworthiness, you are not unworthy in the Scriptural sense, but may freely come. For my own part, I enjoy my holiest seasons when my heart lies low before the Lord. No communion is more intensely sweet than that which washes his feet with tears and covers them with kisses of penitential love. When I have been most ashamed of myself, my Lord has been most glorious in my eyes. When I have, in shame, covered my face, he has, in love, uncovered his own countenance. Come, then, ye weeping saints, for I know that ye seek Jesus; and you are such as he welcomes to his table! Bring your disqualifications, and turn them into confessions of sin; and these, by increasing your hunger, will enable you the better to enjoy the provisions of that sacred table where Jesus is both the host and the food: the bread and the wine, and yet the Master of the feast. Thus much upon those hindrances and disqualifications. It is not a cheering theme.

II. But now, secondly, though we feel and lament our want of preparation, WE MAY STILL COME TO THE FEAST. Let us, to some extent, follow in the track of the men of Hezekiah's time.

They forgot their differences. The one nation had been rent into two, and even in Hezekiah's time there was ill feeling between Ephraim and Judah; but the king of Judah overlooked his boundaries, and we read that the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulun; and divers of Asher and Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. Political and personal feuds were forgotten. They were one family, and they recognized the relationship, and gathered to the one table. I trust none of us are at variance with others; but if we are, let us make peace at once. This we can do on the spot: let us put away every angry and unkind thought. From this foul stuff let all our bosoms be purged at once. The memorials of our dying Lord have slain all our enmity, and given life to our love. This will be a great help towards coming fitly to the table.

We read that when the tribes assembled *they removed the idols.* They took all the altars that were in Jerusalem, and cast them into the brook Kedron. This was a fine beginning for men who did not feel quite

up to the mark. Come, brethren, let us down with our altars of creature worship, cut down the groves of carnal confidence, and break up the graven images of unholy love. If there is anything in our heart that has usurped our Lord's place, let us each one to himself sing very softly this verse:—

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from its throne,
And worship only thee."

Now, open your heart to Jesus, and give him all your love. He is worthy of much more. Young man, have you any ambitions that are apart from Christ's glory? Break them as with a sledge hammer at this moment. Christian man, have you any glory apart from the cross of Jesus? At this moment crucify it. Nail your glory to his cross, and have done with it. Dear sister, are there any loves of yours that are alien to the love of Christ? Have you any secret delight which you could not expose to his view? Any alabaster box which you would not cheerfully break for him? Come, cast away all idols. You cannot keep the feast aright till this, at least, is done: but this accomplished, you may observe it with gladness. How I long to hear the breaker's hammer going. Can it not be done at once? Unless those idols have been so long set up in your heart that there is a question whether you love the Lord at all, they will readily fall from their pedestals. If you love Jesus, your spirit will make your hand quick at this sacred iconoclasm, till you shall have broken down every image which now defiles the temple of your soul.

That done, those who were not all that they desired to be, yet *endeavoured to prepare their hearts.* "Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers." Do you long to seek God to-night? Then there is access for you. I can truly say for myself, that I long, above everything, to meet with my God and Saviour at the table. Though I be in myself unworthy, yet I cannot live without my Lord. I must have him; and nothing else will satisfy me short of fellowship with him. No outward sign, no bread, no wine, no fellowship with God's people will content me: my heart is hungering for her Saviour. My Lord, my God, my heart cries after thee! As the thirsty hart in the wilderness pants for the water-brooks, so does my heart cry out for God, the living God. Is it so with you? Surely the best sort of preparation is already commencing in your soul. Let your heart take its full of this longing and pining, and that is the way in which you will be enabled to come to the sacred table without being an intruder, and without missing the blessing.

Note, next, that Hezekiah *made open and explicit confession unto God* that these people were not as they should have been. He did not excuse them; but he came before God and cried, "The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart." Herein is wisdom. If our hearts are longing after God, let us confess our neglect of meditation, our failure in private prayer, our forgetfulness of self-examination, and our failure in all those other preparations which are

so appropriate to this blessed memorial of our Lord. Thus drawing nigh with sorrow and regret, and with the humble resolve that, in the future, your heart shall endeavour to dwell nearer to the Lord, and further off from the defiling influences of a dead world, you will in spirit and in truth commune with him who never yet sent a penitent from his presence without saying, "Peace be unto you."

Confession made, *let prayer ascend to heaven:* "The good Lord pardon every one of us everything wherein we have been lax, or deficient, or erring. O thou heart-searching God, forgive thy servants, and accept us in Christ Jesus." Thus purified and made white by instantaneous pardon, we need not hesitate to keep the feast. With desire have we desired to feed upon our Lord, who is the true passover, and he will not refuse us. Even to Laodicea he said, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock": even to those who dwell in that lukewarm church he promises to sup with them, if they will but admit him, and, therefore, we are sure that he will sup with us, even with us, though we come blushingly, and with shame upon our faces.

III. We come, in the last place, to notice, that IN SO COMING, WE MAY EXPECT A BLESSING. If we do but come with prepared heart, and great longing of soul, even though we confess ourselves to be disorderly, and have to plead with the Lord to forgive our unfitness, yet he will, without fail, meet with us and enrich us with the blessing which we seek.

God's ways of acting are the same in all ages; and if Hezekiah and his people won the blessing, and "praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord"; even we may look for the like joy, and holy exultation. We read that they "kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with *great gladness*." Beloved, I want you to enter into that great gladness to-night. If there is any place where we are bound to be glad, it is at the Lord's Supper. Remember, this is no funeral feast; it is no memorial of one who lies rotting in the grave. Here we remember that Jesus died, but we also hear those prophetic words, "Until I come." He lives, and he shall shortly come with all the glory and majesty of heaven to claim the kingdoms as his own, and to judge the nations in equity. Therefore have we joy as we come to the table. It is a memorial of a death by which the life of myriads was purchased. It is the memorial of a great struggle which ended in the most glorious of all victories. "It is finished," is the banner which waves over us. Such a victory is a joy for ever, let it be gladly commemorated. Here we celebrate the feast of pardoning love delighting itself in being enabled justly to spare the guilty. Here is the feast of redeemed bondsmen, the jubilee of emancipation from everlasting slavery. We come hither as those that are alive from the dead to feast with him, who, in very truth was slain, but who has risen again, and has become our life and our joy. Oh, for a well-tuned harp! Bring an instrument of ten strings and the psaltery, and let every string be awakened to ecstasy on behalf of Jesus, to set forth in worthy notes his passion and his triumph.

There was great gladness in Israel, even among the men of Ephraim who were not ceremonially fit to keep the passover; and,

following upon this, there was *great praise to God.* They continued singing unto the Lord all the day. The Levites and the priests and the people joined with them, and they brought forth loud instruments to add to the volume of their music. Notice the words, "singing with loud instruments unto the Lord." They employed everything by which to express their overflowing gratitude, their glowing joy. I pray that my Lord's servants may fetch out their loud instruments to-night to sing unto him who loved us, and gave himself for us. Let us lift up the song, "Worthy is the Lamb, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood. Thou shalt reign for ever and ever, King of kings and Lord of lords. Unto thy name be hallelujahs throughout eternity." Oh, for the cymbals, the high-sounding cymbals, that, with their mighty clash, we might express something of the overpowering joy of our spirit before the living God! Brethren, these were the very people who kept the passover, "not according as it was written." They came ill-prepared, unpurified, and utterly unfit; but God blessed them, and helped them to get ready for the holy feast there and then; and I trust he will do so now to those who desire it. How much I long that all of you Christians—half-asleep Christians, lukewarm Christians of a doubtful sort, Christians whose right to commune is gravely questioned by yourselves—I long that you may be quickened on a sudden by the Holy Ghost, who is still in the midst of the church, that you may at once delight yourselves in the Lord, and feel a holy nearness to Christ, and a heavenly exhilaration at the mention of his name. So will you eagerly praise the Beloved of your soul, and bid all that is within you bless his holy name!

Added to this, in the passover in Hezekiah's days, there was *great communion with God*, at least the outward sign of it, for "they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers." In those sacrifices other than sin offerings, a part was put on the altar for God, and a part was given to the priest and the worshipper to feast upon, that they might thus, in symbol, hold fellowship with God. Oh, for a measure of hallowed fellowship with God at this time! Many of you know what it means. If you do not, I cannot explain it to you. You must taste and see for yourselves. May it be with us to-night as it was with the elders on the side of Sinai, of whom it is written, "They did see God, and did eat and drink." What a wonderful combination! Yet what an instructive conjunction! "They did see God, and did eat and drink." Oh that we might eat and drink with our Lord at this time as men eat with their friends! May we now see that face which no earthly eye can see! May we hear that voice which sounds not in mortal ear, but penetrates the soul! Oh, that we may see him who is invisible! We may do so even now. I mean even you, who feel least prepared, can yet enjoy this supreme delight. Oh, that you may do so till you assure me that I have not told you the half of what you now taste and feel. I pray the Lord that the soft south wind may blow warmly across this congregation, till all the winter is gone from your spirits, and you feel the icebergs within your souls dissolved and running away in streams of praiseful gratitude to him who has loved you of old, and now manifests himself to you. There is a secret charm,

a silent energy of the Holy Spirit, which, in quiet, he can exert over the minds of his people; and I pray that you may know it now, even you that are least prepared for the engagement which at this moment lies before us.

Then there came upon the people *a great enthusiasm*, insomuch that they resolved to have another seven days of holy convocation, just as Solomon did when they consecrated the temple. We are told that "they took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness." I love to find people so possessed with the Spirit of God that they say, "That service was by far too short. I wish it had kept on for another hour." I love to see them lingering, as if they could not quit a place in which they have been so greatly blessed. How pleasant to go away, not loathing, but longing; watching till another Sabbath shall come, that we may hear again of the same sacred matter, and feel again the same dew from the Lord! How we tremble lest the heavenly blessings should be withdrawn! for we feel that we can no more command them than we could bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion. Since we have been in the sacred chambers of the King, we have feared lest our golden keys should be missing, so that we could not enter into his treasury again, or again approach his seat. You know how you feel when your heart sings of the place

> "Where congregations ne'er break up,
> And Sabbaths have no end."

When you long for that protracted worship, it shows that God is very present with you; and it was so with the people in Hezekiah's days, who, nevertheless, were at the first unprepared for the Paschal festival. May you who are now dull become so joyous that you are eager to turn a seven days' feast into fourteen; may your enthusiasm know no bounds; may you rise as on wings of eagles, and maintain your highest soaring for many a day!

Furthermore, this brought about a *great liberality*. Everybody wanted to offer sacrifices; everybody was anxious to feed his poorer brethren; the king gave a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes would not be outdone by him; they must needs go just a touch beyond him, for they gave a thousand bullocks and *ten* thousand sheep. Meanwhile, a host of priests came, and more fully surrendered themselves to the service of Jehovah their God. How I wish that some such result would follow the present service! Oh, that many of you would give largely of your substance to the cause of God, and may others give themselves more fully to the great Master's service! From this time forth, may devoted men and consecrated women be found in all our families, and may the kraals of Africa and the Zenanas of India be the better for it.

Did you observe in the reading, how the people finished the festival? They had *another great breaking of idols*. The hammers gave forth their music again, and the images went to pieces. All that which was displeasing to God became displeasing to the people, and they swept it away. That was the finale; for, when God goes up, the devil goes down. As sure as ever you love God, you must hate idols. You

cannot rejoice in him, and yet rejoice in the world, the flesh, and the devil. What sacred jealousy, what holy revenge, what destruction of every evil thing within the soul, is sure to follow when the Beloved unveils his charming face, and all our soul is melted with the beams of his love! Nothing hastens sanctification like communion with God. May this table be to all of you the place of your renewed tryst with Jesus! May you again take him by the hand, and surrender to him; while he shall take you by the hand, and work in you all the good pleasure of his will! Let marriage vows with Jesus be repeated here. May our living union with him become more consciously a matter of fact! May this be a sanctifying season! May this be so even with you who were just now saying, "I do not think that I dare stop to the communion! I do not feel aright, nor desire aright. I am dead, stupid, heavy; and I fear I should only profane the sacred table." Cry to the Lord, as Hezekiah did! Mingle your confessions and your prayers before the mercy-seat; and may the good Lord pardon each one of you, even though you are not purged after the purification of the sanctuary as you could desire.

The Lord bless his waiting people, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Numbers ix.; 2 Chronicles xxx.

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CHRIST PUT ON.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 23RD, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."—Romans xiii. 14.

CHRIST must be in us before he can be on us. Grace puts Christ within, and enables us to put on Christ without. Christ must be in the heart by faith, before he can be in the life by holiness. If you want light from a lantern, the first business is to light the candle inside of it; and then, as a consequence, the light shines through, to be seen of men. When Christ is formed in you, the hope of glory, do not conceal your love to him; but put him on in your conduct as the glory of your hope. As you have Christ within as your Saviour, the secret of your inner life, so put on Christ to be the beauty of your daily life. Let the external be brightened by the internal; and this shall be to you that "armour of light" which all the soldiers of the Lord Jesus are privileged to wear. As Christ is your food, nourishing the inner man, so put him on as your dress, covering the outer man.

"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." It is a very wonderful expression. It is most condescending on our Lord's part to allow of such an exhortation. Paul speaks the mind of the Holy Spirit, and the word is full of meaning. Oh, for grace to learn its teaching! It is full of very solemn warning to us, for we need a covering thus divinely perfect. Oh, for grace to practise the command to put it on! The apostle does not so much say, "Take up the Lord Jesus Christ, and *bear* him with you;" but, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," and thus *wear* him as the garment of your life. A man takes up his staff for a journey, or his sword for a battle; but he lays these down again after a while: you are to put on the Lord Jesus as you put on your garment; and thus he is to cover you, and to become part and parcel of your outward appearance, surrounding your very self, as a visible part of your manifest personality.

"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." This we do when we believe in him: then we put on the Lord Jesus Christ as our robe of righteousness. It is a very beautiful picture of what faith does. Faith finds our manhood naked to its shame; faith sees that Christ Jesus is the

robe of righteousness provided for our need, and faith, at the command of the gospel, appropriates him, and gets the benefit of him for it. By faith the soul covers her weakness with his strength, her sin with his atonement, her folly with his wisdom, her failure with his triumphs, her death with his life, her wanderings with his constancy. By faith, I say, the soul hides itself within Jesus; till Jesus only is seen, and the man is seen in him. We take not only his righteousness as being imputed to us, but we take himself to be really ours; and so his righteousness becomes ours as a matter of fact. "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." His righteousness is set to our account, and becomes ours because *he* is ours. I, though long unrighteous in myself, believe in the testimony of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ, and I am accounted righteous, even as it is written, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." The riches of God in Christ Jesus become mine as I take the Lord Jesus Christ to be everything to me.

But, you see, the text does not distinctly refer to this great matter, for the apostle is not referring to the imputed righteousness of Christ. The text stands in connection with precepts concerning matters of every-day practical life, and to these it must refer. It is not justification, but sanctification that we have here. Moreover, we cannot be said to put on the imputed righteousness of Christ after we have believed, for that is upon us as soon as we believe, and needs no more putting on. The command before us is given to those who have the imputed righteousness of Christ, who are justified, who are accepted in Christ Jesus. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" is a word to you that are saved by Christ, and justified by his righteousness. You are to put on Christ, and keep on putting him on in the sanctifying of your lives unto your God. You are every day continually more and more to wear as the dress of your lives the character of your Lord.

I will handle this subject by answering questions. First, *Where are we to go for our daily dress?* "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Secondly, *What is this daily dress?* "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Thirdly, *How are we to act towards evil when we are thus clad?* "And make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." And then I will finish with the consideration of the question, *Why should we hasten to put on this matchless dress?* For "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us put on the armour of light."

I. May the Holy Spirit help us while we, in the first place, answer the inquiry, WHERE ARE WE TO GO FOR DAILY DRESS? Beloved, there is but one answer to all questions as to our necessities. We go to the Lord Jesus Christ for everything. To us "Christ is all." "He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." When you have come to Christ for pardon and justification, you are not to go elsewhere for the next thing. Having begun with Jesus, you are to go on with him, even to the end; "for ye are complete in him," perfectly stored in Christ, fully equipped in him. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." Every necessity that can ever press upon you between this Marah in the wilderness and yonder sea of glass before the throne, will be found to be met in Christ Jesus. You ask, What am I to do for a

vesture which will befit the courts of the Lord? for armour that will protect me from the assaults of the foe? for a robe that will enable me to act as a priest and king unto God? The one answer to the much-including question is, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." You have no further need. You need not look elsewhere for a thread or a shoe latchet.

So, dear friends, I gather from this, that if we seek *an example*, we may not look elsewhere than to our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not written, "Put ye on this man or that"; but "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." The model for a saint is his Saviour. We are very apt to select some eminently gracious or useful man to be a pattern to us. A measure of good may result from such a course, but a degree of evil may also come of it. There will always be some fault about the most excellent of our fellow-mortals; and as our tendency is to caricature virtues till we make them faults, so is it our greater folly to mistake faults for excellences, and copy them with careful exactness, and generally with abundant exaggeration. By this plan, with the best intentions, we may reach very sad results. Follow Jesus in the way, and thou wilt not err: let thy feet go down exactly in his foot-prints, and thou canst not slide. As his grace enables us, let us make it true, that "as he was, so are we in this world." You need not look beyond your Lord for example under any circumstances. Of him you may enquire as of an unfailing oracle. You need never enquire what is the general custom of those about you: the broad road of the many is no way for you. You may not ask, "What are the rulers of the people doing?" You follow not the fashion of the great, but the example of the greatest of all. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" will apply to each one of us. If I am a tradesman, I am not to ask myself—On what principles do other traders conduct their business? Not so. What the world may do is no rule for me. If I am a student I should not enquire—How do others feel towards religion? Let others do as they will, it is for us to serve the Lord. In every relationship, in the domestic circle, in the literary world, in the sphere of friendship, or in business connections, I am to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." If I am perplexed, I am bound to ask—What would Jesus do? and his example is to guide me. If I cannot conceive of his acting in a certain way, neither must I allow myself to do so; but if I perceive, from his precept, his spirit, or his action, that he would follow such and such a course, to that line I must keep. I am not to put on the philosopher, the politician, the priest, or the popularity hunter; but I am to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, by taking his life to be the model upon which I fashion my own life.

From our text I should also gather that we are to go to the Lord Jesus Christ for *stimulus*. We want not only an example, but a motive, an impulse and constraining power to keep us true to that example. We need to put on zeal as a cloak, and to be covered with a holy influence which will urge us onward. Let us go to the Lord Jesus for motives. Some fly to Moses, and would drive themselves to duty by the thunders of Sinai. Their design in service is to earn eternal life, or prevent the loss of the favour of God. Thus they come under law, and forsake the true way of the believer, which is faith. Not from dread of

punishment or hope of hire do believers serve the living God; but we put on Christ, and the love of Christ constraineth us. Here is the spring of true holiness: "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." A stronger force than law has gripped you: you serve God, not as servants, whose sole thought is the wage, but as children, whose eye is on the father and his love. Your motive is gratitude to him by whose precious blood you are redeemed. He has put on *your* cause, and therefore you would take up *his* cause. I pray you, go not to the steep sides of Sinai to find motives for holiness; but hasten to Calvary, and there find those sweet herbs of love, which shall be the medicine of your soul. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Covered with a consciousness of his love, fired with love to him in return, you will be strong to be, to do, or to suffer, as the Lord God may appoint.

Need I say, never find a reason for doing right in a desire to win the approbation of your fellow-men? Do not say, "I must do this or that in order to please my company." That is poor life which is sustained by the breath of other men's nostrils. Followers of Jesus will not wear the livery of custom, or stand in awe of human censure. Love of commendation, and fear of disapprobation, are low and beggarly motives: they sway the feeble many, but they ought not to rule the man in Christ. You must be moved by a far higher consideration: you serve the Lord Christ, and must not, therefore, become the lackey of men. His glory is to be your one aim; and for the joy of this you must treat all else as a light thing. Here we find our spur—"The love of Christ constraineth us."

Beloved, the text means more than this. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ"; that is, find in Jesus your *strength*. Although you are saved, and are quickened by the Holy Spirit, so as to be a living child of the living God, yet you have no strength for heavenly duty, except as you receive it from above. Go to Jesus for power. I charge you, never say, "I shall do the right because I have resolved to do it. I am a man of strong mind; I am determined to resist this evil, and I know I shall not yield. I have made up my mind, and there is no fear of my turning aside." Brother, if you rely upon yourself in that way, you will soon prove to be a broken reed. Failure follows at the heel of self-confidence. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

I charge you, do not rely upon what you have acquired in the past. Say not in your heart, "I am a man of experience, and therefore I can resist temptation, which would crush the younger and greener folk. I have now spent so many years in persistent well-doing that I may reckon myself out of danger. Is it likely that I should ever be led astray?" O sir, it is more than likely! It is a fact already. The moment that a man declares he cannot fall, he has already fallen from sobriety and humility. Your head is turned, my brother, or you would not talk of your inward perfection; and when the head turns, the feet are not very safe. Inward conceit is the mother of open sin. Make Christ your strength, and not yourself; nor your acquirements or experiences. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" day by day, and make not the rags of yesterday to be the raiment of the future. Get grace fresh and fresh. Say with David, "All my fresh springs are

in thee." Get all your power for holiness and usefulness from Jesus, and from him alone. "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Rely not on resolves, pledges, methods, prayers; but lean on Jesus only as the strength of your life.

"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." This is a wonderful word to me, because it indicates that in the Lord Jesus we have *perfection*. I shall in a moment or two show you some of the virtues and graces which are resplendent in the character of our Lord Jesus Christ. These may be likened to different parts of our armour or dress—the helmet, the shoes, the breast-plate. But the text does not say, "Put on this quality or virtue of the Lord Christ"; but "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." He himself, as a whole, is to be our array. Not this excellence or that; but himself. He must be to us a sacred over-all. I know not by what other means to bring out my meaning: he is to cover us from head to foot. We do not so much copy his humility, his gentleness, his love, his zeal, his prayerfulness, as himself. Endeavour to come into such communion with Jesus himself that his character is reproduced in you. Oh, to be wrapped about with himself: feeling, desiring, acting, as he felt, desired, and acted. What a raiment for our spiritual nature is our Lord Jesus Christ! What an honourable robe for a man to wear! Why, in that case, our life would be hid in Christ, and he would be seen over us in a life quickened by his Spirit, swayed by his motives, sweetened with his sympathy, pursuing his designs, and following in his steps. When we read, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," it means, Receive the whole character of Christ, and let your whole character be conformed to his will. Cover your whole being with the whole of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a wonderful precept! Oh, for grace to carry it out! May the Lord turn the command into an actual fact. Throughout the rest of our lives may we be more and more like Jesus, that the purpose of God may be fulfilled wherein we are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son."

Once more, observe the *speciality* which is seen in this dress. It is specially adapted to each individual believer. Paul does not say merely to one person, "Put *thou* on the Lord Jesus Christ," but to all of us, "Put *ye* on the Lord Jesus Christ." Can all the saints put on Christ, whether babes, young men, or fathers? You could not all of you wear my coat, I am quite certain; and I am equally certain that I could not wear the garments of many of the young people now present; but here is a matchless garment, which will be found suitable for every believer, without expansion or contraction. Whoever puts on the Lord Jesus Christ has put on a robe which will be his glory and beauty. In every case the example of Jesus is admirably suited for copying. Suppose a child of God should be a king; what better advice could I give to him, when about to rule a nation, than this, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ"? Be such a king as Jesus would have been. Nay, copy his royal character. Suppose, on the other hand, that the person before us is a poor woman from the workhouse; shall I say the same to her? Yes, and with equal propriety; for Jesus was very poor, and is a most suitable example for those who have no home of their own. O worker, put on Christ, and be full of zeal! O sufferer,

put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and abound in patience! Yonder friend is going to the Sunday-school this afternoon. Well, in order to win those dear children to the Saviour, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." In his sacred raiment you will make a good teacher. Are you a preacher, and about to address thousands of grown-up persons? How better can I advise you than that you put on Christ and preach the gospel in his own loving, pleading, earnest style. The preacher's model should be his Lord. This is our preaching gown, our praying surplice, our pastoral robe—the character and spirit of the Lord Jesus; and it admirably suits each form of service.

No man's example will precisely fit his fellow-man; but there is this strange virtue about the character of Christ, that you may all imitate it, and yet be none of you mere imitators. He is perfectly natural who is perfectly like Christ. There need be no affectation, no painful restraint, no straining. In a life thus fashioned there will be nothing grotesque or disproportionate, unmanly or romantic. So wonderfully is Jesus the Second Adam of the new-born race, that each member of that family may bear a likeness to him, and yet exhibit a clear individuality. A man advanced in years and wisdom may put him on, and so may the least instructed, and the freshest comer among us. Please remember this: we may not choose examples, but each one is bound to copy the Lord Jesus Christ. You, dear friend, have a special personality; you are such a person that there is not another exactly like you, and you are placed in circumstances so peculiar that no one else is tried exactly as you are;—to you, then, is this exhortation sent: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." It is absolutely certain, that for you, with your personal singularity, and peculiar circumstances, there can be nothing better than that you array yourself in this more than royal robe. You, too, who live in ordinary circumstances, and are only tried by common temptations, you are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ"; for he will be suitable for you also. "Oh," cries one, "but the Lord Jesus never was exactly where I am!" You say this from want of knowing better, or from want of thought. He has been tempted in all points like as you are. There are certain relationships which the Lord Jesus could not literally occupy; but then, he took their spiritual counterpart. For instance, Jesus could not be a husband after the flesh. Does anyone demand how he could be an example for husbands? Hearken! "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." He is your model in a relationship which, naturally, he never sustained, but which, in very deed, he has more than fulfilled. Wherever you may be, you find that the Lord Jesus has occupied the counterpart of your position, or else the position is sinful, and ought to be quitted. In any place, at any hour, under any circumstances, in any matter, you may put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and never fear that your array will be unsuitable. Here you have a summer and winter garment—good in prosperity, as well as in adversity. Here you have a garment for the private chamber or the public forum, for sickness or for health, for honour or for reproach, for life or for death. "Put ye on the Lord

Jesus Christ," and in this raiment of wrought gold you may enter into the King's palace, and stand among the spirits of just men made perfect.

II. Secondly, trusting to the Holy Spirit, let us enquire WHAT IS THIS DAILY DRESS? The Lord Jesus Christ is to be put on. May the Spirit of God help us to do so!

We see how the sacred dress is *here described* in three words. The sacred titles of the Son of God are spread out at length: "Put ye on the Lord—Jesus—Christ." Put him on as *Lord*. Call him your master and Lord, and you will do well. Be you his servant in everything. Submit every faculty, every capacity, every talent, every possession to his government. Submit all that you have and are to him, and delight to own his superior right and his royal claim to you. Be Christ's man; his servant, under bonds to his service for ever, finding therein life and liberty. Let the dominion of your Lord cover the kingdom of your nature. Then put on *Jesus*. Jesus means a Saviour: in every part be covered by him in that blessed capacity. You, a sinner, hide yourself in Jesus, your Saviour, who shall save you from your sins. He is your sanctifier driving out sin, and your preserver keeping sin from returning. Jesus is your armour against sin. You overcome through his blood. In him you are defended against every weapon of the enemy: he is your shield, keeping you from all evil. He covers you all over like a complete suit of armour, so that when arrows of temptation fly like a fiery shower, they may be quenched upon heavenly mail, and you may stand unharmed amid a shower of deaths. Put on Jesus, and then put on *Christ*. You know that Christ signifies "anointed." Now, our Lord is anointed as Prophet, Priest, and King, and as such we put him on. What a splendid thing it is to put on Christ as the anointed *Prophet*, and to accept his teaching as our creed! I believe it. Why? Because he said it. This is argument enough for me. Mine not to argue, or doubt, or criticize; the Christ has said it, and I, putting him on, find in his authority the end of all strife. What Christ declares, I believe; discussion ends where Christ begins. Put him on also as your *Priest*. Notwithstanding your sin, your unworthiness, your defilement, go to the altar of the Lord by him who, as Priest, has taken away your sin, clothed you with his merit, and made you acceptable to God. In our great High Priest we enter within the veil. We are in him; by faith we realize this, and so put him on as our Priest, and lose ourselves in his accepted sacrifice. Our Lord Jesus is also anointed to be *King*. Oh, put him on in all his imperial majesty, by yielding your every wish and thought to his sway! Set him on the throne of your heart. As you have submitted your thought and understanding to his prophetic instruction, submit your action and your practical life to his kingly government. As you put on his priesthood and find atonement in him, so put on his royalty and find holiness in him.

I now wish to show *the description given in Colossians iii.* from the twelfth verse. I will take you to the wardrobe for a minute, and ask you to look over the articles of our outfit. See here, "Put on therefore"; you see everything is to be put on; nothing is to be left on the pegs for the moth to eat, nor in the window to be idly stared at:

you *put on* the whole armour of God. In true religion everything is designed for practical use. We keep no garments in the drawer; we have to put on all that is provided. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness." Here are two choice things: mercy and kindness—silken robes indeed! Have you put them on? I am to be as merciful, as tender-hearted, as kind, as sympathetic, as loving to my fellow-men as Christ himself was. Have I reached this point? Have I ever aimed at it? Who among us has put on these royal gloves?

See what follows—these choice things come in pairs—"humbleness of mind, meekness." These choice garments are not so much esteemed as they should be. The cloth of one called "Proud-of-heart" is very fashionable, and the trimmings of Mr. Masterful are much in request. It is a melancholy thing to see what great men some Christians are. Truly, the footman is bigger than his master. How some who would be thought saints can bluster and bully! Is this to put on the Lord Jesus Christ? Point me to a word of our Lord's in which he scolded, and tyrannized, and overrode any man. He was meek and lowly, even he, the Lord of all: what ought we to be, who are not worthy to loose the latchets of his shoes? Permit me to say to any dear brother who has not a very tender nature, who is naturally hard and rasping, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," my brother, and make not provision for that unfeeling nature of yours. Endeavour to be lowly in mind, that you may be gentle in spirit.

See, next, we are to put on longsuffering and forbearance. Some men have no patience with others: how can they expect God to have patience with them? If everything is not done to their mind they are in a fine fury. Dear me! whom have we here? Is this a servant of Mars, or of the Fire-god? Surely, this fighting man does not profess to be a worshipper of Christ! Do not tell me that the man lost his temper. It would be a mercy if he had lost it, so as never to find it again. He is selfish, petulant, exacting, and easily provoked. Has this man the spirit of Christ? If he be a Christian, he is a naked Christian, and I would urge him to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," that he may be fitly clothed. Our Lord was full of forbearance. "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied, and faint in your minds." Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and bear and forbear. Put up with a great deal that really ought not to be inflicted upon you, and be ready to bear still more rather than give or take offence.

"Forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Is not this heavenly teaching? Put it in practice. Put ye on your Lord. Have you fallen to loggerheads with one another, and did I hear one of you growling, "I'll, I'll, I'll——"? Stop, brother! What will you do? If you are true to the Lord Jesus Christ you will not avenge yourself, but give place unto wrath. Put the Lord Jesus on your tongue, and you will not talk so bitterly; put him on your heart, and you will not feel so fiercely; put him on your whole character, and you will readily forgive, not only this once, but unto seventy times seven. If you have been unjustly treated by one who should have been your friend, lay

aside wrath, and begin again; and perhaps your brother will begin again also, and both of you by love will overcome evil. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." Love is the girdle which binds up the other garments, and keeps all the other graces well braced, and in their right places. Put on love—what a golden girdle! Are we all putting on love? We have been baptized into Christ, and we profess to have put on Christ; but do we daily try to put on love? Our baptism was not true if we are not buried to all old enmities. We may have a great many faults, but God grant that we may be full of love to Jesus, to his people, and to all mankind!

How much I wish that we could all put on, and keep on, the next article of this wardrobe! "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." Oh, for a peaceful mind! Oh, to rest in the Lord! I recommend that last little word, "Be ye thankful," to farmers and others whose interests are depressed. I might equally recommend it to certain tradespeople, whose trade is quite as good as they could expect. "Things *are* a little better," said one to me; and at that time he was heaping up riches. When things are extremely well, people say they are "middling," or a "little better"; but when there is a slight falling off, they cry out about "nothing doing, stagnation, universal ruin." Thankfulness is a rare virtue; but let the lover of the Lord Jesus abound in it. The possession of your mind in peace, keeping yourself quiet, calm, self-possessed, content—this is a blessed state; and in such a state Jesus was; therefore, "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." He was never in a fret or fume. He was never hurried or worried; he never repined or coveted. Had he nothing to worry him? More than you have, brother. Had he not many things to distress him? More than all of us put together. Yet he was not ruffled, but showed a prince-like calm, a divine serenity. This our Lord would have us wear. His peace he leaves with us, and his joy he would have fulfilled in us. He wishes us to go through life with the peace of God keeping our hearts and minds from the assaults of the enemy. He would have us quiet and strong—strong because quiet, quiet because strong.

I have read of a great man, that he took two hours and a half to dress himself every morning. In this he showed rather littleness than greatness; but if any of you put on the Lord Jesus Christ you may take what time you will in making such a toilet. It will take you all your lives, my brothers and sisters, fully to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to keep him on. For let me again say, that you are not only to put on all these garments which I have shown to you in the wardrobe of the Colossians, but, more than this, you are to put on all else that makes up Christ himself. What a dress is this! "Put on Christ," says the text.

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ for daily wear. Not for high days and holy days only, but for all time, and every time. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ on the Lord's-day, but do not lay him aside during the week. Ladies have ornaments which they put on occasionally

for display on grand occasions: as a rule, these jewels are hidden away in a jewel-case. Christians, you must wear your jewels always. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and have no casket in which to conceal any part of him. Put on Christ to keep him on. I saw a missionary from the cold north the other day, and he was wearing a coat of moose-skin, which he had worn among the Red Indians. "It is a capital coat," he said, "there's nothing like leather. I have worn it for eleven years." In the arctic region through which he had travelled, he had worn this garment both by night and by day; for the climate was much too cold to allow the taking off of anything. Brethren, the world is far too cold to allow of our taking off Christ even for an hour. So many arrows are flying about that we dare not remove a single piece of our armour even for an instant. Thank God, we have in our Lord a dress which we may always wear. We can live in it, and die in it; we can work in it, and rest in it, and, like the raiment of Israel in the wilderness, it will never wax old. Put it on more and more.

If you have put on something of Christ, put on more of Christ. I dare not say much in commendation of apparel, here in England, for the tendency is to exceed in that direction; yet I noticed, the other day, the remark of a missionary in the South Sea Islands, that as the heathen people became converted they began to clothe themselves, and as they acquired tenderness of conscience, and delicacy of feeling, they gave more attention to dress—wearing more clothes, and of a better sort. However that may be as to dress for the body, it is certainly so as to the arraying of the soul. As we make spiritual progress, we have more graces and more virtues than in the beginning. Once we were content to wear faith only, but now we put on hope and love. Once if we wore humbleness, we failed to wear thankfulness; but our text exhorts us to wear a full dress, a court suit; for we are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." You cannot wear too much of him. Be covered from head to foot with him.

Put on the Lord in every time of trial. Do not take him off when it comes to the test. Quaint Henry Smith says that some people wear the Lord Jesus as a man wears his hat, which he takes off to everybody he meets. I am afraid I know persons of that kind, who wear Christ in private, but they off with him in company, especially in the company of the worldly, the sarcastic, and the unbelieving. Put on Christ, intending never to put him off again. When tempted, tried, ridiculed, hear in your ear this voice, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Put him on the more as others tempt you to put him off.

III. My time fails me, and I must hurriedly notice, in the third place, HOW WE ARE TO ACT IN THIS DRESS TOWARDS EVIL. The text says, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." By the flesh is here meant the evil part of us, which is so greatly aided by the appetites and desires of the body. When a man puts on Christ, has he still the flesh about him? Alas! it is even so. I hear some brethren say that they have no remaining corruptions. I claim liberty to believe as much as I like of a man's statements as to his own personal character. When he bears witness concerning himself, his witness may or may not be true. When a man tells me that he is perfect, I hear what he has to say,

but I quietly think within myself that if he had been so, he would not have felt the necessity of spreading the information. "Good wine needs no bush"; and when our town once holds a perfect man within its bounds there will be no need to advertise him. Goods that are puffed probably need puffery. Brethren, I fear we have all very much of the flesh about us, and therefore we need be on our guard against it. What does the apostle say? "Make no provision for the flesh." By this, he means several things.

First, give *no tolerance* to it. Do not say, "Christ has sanctified me so far; but you see I have a bad temper naturally, and you cannot expect it to be removed." Dear brother, do not make provision for thus sheltering and sparing one of your soul's enemies. Another cries. "You know I always was a good deal desponding; and therefore I can never have much joy in the Lord." Don't make room for your unbelief. If you find a kennel for this dog, it will always lie in it. "But," says another, "I was always rather fond of gaiety, and so I must mix up with the world." Well, if you cook a dinner for the devil, he will take a seat at your table. This is to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of it. Do not so; but slay the Canaanites, break their idols, throw down their altars, and fell their groves.

Moreover, give sin *no time*. Allow no furlough to your obedience. Do not say to yourself, "At all other times I am exact, but once in a year, at a family meeting, I take a little liberty." Is it liberty to you to sin? I am afraid there is something rotten in your heart. "Ah!" cries one, "I only allow myself an hour or two occasionally with questionable company. I know it does me harm; but we must all have a little relaxation, and the talk is very amusing, though rather loose." Is evil a relaxation to you? It ought to be worse than slavery. What a trial is foolish talking to a child of God! How can you find pleasure in it? Give no license to the flesh; you cannot tell how far it will go. Keep it always under subjection, and make no space for its indulgence.

Provide *no food* for it. Carve it no rations. Starve it out; at any rate, if it wants fodder, let it look elsewhere. When you are allotting your provision to the body, the soul, the spirit, allot nothing to the depraved passions. If the flesh says, "What is for me?" say. "Nothing." Some people like a little bit of reading for the flesh. As some people like a little bit of what they call "rather high" meat, so do these folk enjoy a portion of tainted doctrine, or questionable morality. Thus they make provision for the flesh, and the flesh takes care to feed thereon, and to give its lusts a meal. I have known professors, whom I would not dare to judge, dabble just a little in matters which they would forbid to others, but they think them allowable to themselves, if done in secret. "You must not be too exact," they say. But the apostle says, "Make not provision for the flesh." Do not give it a morsel; do not even allow it the crumbs that fall from your table. The flesh is greedy, and never hath enough; and if you give it some provision, it will steal much more.

"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," and then you will leave *no place* for the lusts of the flesh. That which Christ does not cover is naked unto sin. If Christ be my livery, and I wear him, and so am

known to be his avowed servant, then I place myself entirely in his hands always and for ever, and the flesh has no claim whatsoever upon me. If, before I put on Christ, I might make some reserve, and duty did not call, yet now that the Lord Jesus Christ is upon me, I have done with reserves, and am openly and confessedly my Lord's. "Know ye not," saith the apostle, "that as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ?" Being buried with him, we are dead to the world, and live only unto him. The Lord bring us up to this mark by his mighty Spirit; and he shall have the glory of it.

IV. If this be the case, and we have indeed "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," we will thank God evermore; but if it be not so, let us not delay to be arrayed in this dress. WHY SHOULD WE HASTEN TO PUT ON CHRIST? A moment is all that remains. It is dark. Here is armour made of solid light; let us put on this attire at once; then the night will be light about us, and others beholding us will glorify God, and ask for the same raiment. With so dense a night round about us, a man needs to be dressed in luminous robes; he needs to wear the light of God, he needs thus to be practically protected from the darkness around him.

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," moreover; for the night will soon be over: the morning will soon dawn. The rags of sin, the sordid robes of worldliness, are not fit attire for the heavenly morning. Let us dress for the sun-rising. Let us go forth to meet the dawn with garments of light about us.

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," for he is coming, the beloved of our souls! Over the hills we hear the trumpet sounding; the heralds are crying aloud, "The bridegroom cometh! The bridegroom cometh!" Though he has seemed to tarry, he has been always coming post haste. To-day we hear his chariot-wheels in the distance. Nearer and nearer is his advent. Let us not sleep as do others. Blessed are they who will be ready for the wedding when the Bridegroom cometh. What is that wedding dress that shall make us ready? Nothing can make us more fit to meet Christ, and to be with him in his glory, than for us to put on Christ to-day. If I wear Christ as my dress I do great honour to Christ as my Bridegroom. If I take him for my glory and my beauty while I am here, I may be sure that he will be all that and more to me in eternity. If I take pleasure in Jesus here, Jesus will take pleasure in me when he shall meet me in the air, and take me up to dwell with himself for ever. Put on the wedding dress, ye beloved of the Lord! Put on the wedding dress, ye brides of the Lamb, and put it on at once, for behold he cometh! Haste, haste, ye slumbering virgins! Arise and trim your lamps! Put on your robes, and be ready to behold his glory, and to take part in it. O ye virgin souls, go forth to meet him; with joy and gladness go forth, wearing himself as your gorgeous apparel, fit for the daughters of a King. The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans xii.; xiii. 8—14.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—917, 262, 263.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"LAMA SABACHTHANI?"

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 2ND, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—Matthew xxvii. 46.

"THERE was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour": this cry came out of that darkness. Expect not to see through its every word, as though it came from on high as a beam from the unclouded Sun of Righteousness. There is light in it, bright, flashing light; but there is a centre of impenetrable gloom, where the soul is ready to faint because of the terrible darkness.

Our Lord was then in the darkest part of his way. He had trodden the winepress now for hours, and the work was almost finished. He had reached the culminating point of his anguish. This is his dolorous lament from the lowest pit of misery—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" I do not think that the records of time, or even of eternity, contain a sentence more full of anguish. Here the wormwood and the gall, and all the other bitternesses, are outdone. Here you may look as into a vast abyss; and though you strain your eyes, and gaze till sight fails you, yet you perceive no bottom; it is measureless, unfathomable, inconceivable. This anguish of the Saviour on your behalf and mine is no more to be measured and weighed than the sin which needed it, or the love which endured it. We will adore where we cannot comprehend.

I have chosen this subject that it may help the children of God to understand a little of their infinite obligations to their redeeming Lord. You shall measure the height of his love, if it be ever measured, by the depth of his grief, if that can ever be known. See with what a price he hath redeemed us from the curse of the law! As you see this, say to yourselves: What manner of people ought we to be! What measure of love ought we to return to one who bore the utmost penalty, that we might be delivered from the wrath to come? I do not profess that I can dive into this deep: I will only venture to the edge of the precipice, and bid you look down, and pray the Spirit of God to concentrate your mind upon this lamentation of

our dying Lord, as it rises up through the thick darkness—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Our first subject of thought will be *the fact;* or, what he suffered—God had forsaken him. Secondly, we will note, *the enquiry;* or, why he suffered: this word "why" is the edge of the text. "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Then, thirdly, we will consider *the answer;* or, what came of his suffering. The answer flowed softly into the soul of the Lord Jesus without the need of words, for he ceased from his anguish with the triumphant shout of, "It is finished." His work was finished, and his bearing of desertion was a chief part of the work he had undertaken for our sake.

I. By the help of the Holy Spirit, let us first dwell upon THE FACT; or, what our Lord suffered. God had forsaken him. Grief of mind is harder to bear than pain of body. You can pluck up courage and endure the pang of sickness and pain, so long as the spirit is hale and brave; but if the soul itself be touched, and the mind becomes diseased with anguish, then every pain is increased in severity, and there is nothing with which to sustain it. Spiritual sorrows are the worst of mental miseries. A man may bear great depression of spirit about worldly matters, if he feels that he has his God to go to. He is cast down, but not in despair. Like David, he dialogues with himself, and he enquires, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him." But if the Lord be once withdrawn, if the comfortable light of his presence be shadowed even for an hour, there is a torment within the breast, which I can only liken to the prelude of hell. This is the greatest of all weights that can press upon the heart. This made the Psalmist plead, "Hide not thy face from me; put not thy servant away in anger." We can bear a bleeding body, and even a wounded spirit; but a soul conscious of desertion by God is beyond conception unendurable. When he holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it, who can endure the darkness?

This voice out of "the belly of hell" marks the lowest depth of the Saviour's grief. *The desertion was real.* Though under some aspects our Lord could say, "The Father is with me"; yet was it solemnly true that God did forsake him. It was not a failure of faith on his part which led him to imagine what was not actual fact. Our faith fails us, and then we think that God has forsaken us; but our Lord's faith did not for a moment falter, for he says twice, "*My* God, *my* God." Oh, the mighty double grip of his unhesitating faith! He seems to say, "Even if thou hast forsaken me, I have not forsaken thee." Faith triumphs, and there is no sign of any faintness of heart towards the living God. Yet, strong as is his faith, he feels that God has withdrawn his comfortable fellowship, and he shivers under the terrible deprivation.

It was no fancy, or delirium of mind, caused by his weakness of body, the heat of the fever, the depression of his spirit, or the near approach of death. He was clear of mind even to this last. He bore up under pain, loss of blood, scorn, thirst, and desolation; making no complaint of the cross, the nails, and the scoffing. We read not in

the Gospels of anything more than the natural cry of weakness, "I thirst." All the tortures of his body he endured in silence; but when it came to being forsaken of God, then his great heart burst out into its "Lama sabachthani?" His one moan is concerning his God. It is not, "Why has Peter forsaken me? Why has Judas betrayed me?" These were sharp griefs, but this is the sharpest. This stroke has cut him to the quick: "My God, my God, why hast *thou* forsaken me?" It was no phantom of the gloom; it was a real absence which he mourned.

This was *a very remarkable desertion.* It is not the way of God to leave either his sons or his servants. His saints, when they come to die, in their great weakness and pain, find him near. They are made to sing because of the presence of God: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." Dying saints have clear visions of the living God. Our observation has taught us that if the Lord be away at other times, he is never absent from his people in the article of death, or in the furnace of affliction. Concerning the three holy children, we do not read that the Lord was ever visibly with them till they walked the fires of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace; but there and then the Lord met with them. Yes, beloved, it is God's use and wont to keep company with his afflicted people; and yet he forsook his Son in the hour of his tribulation! How usual it is to see the Lord with his faithful witnesses when resisting even unto blood! Read the Book of Martyrs, and I care not whether you study the former or the later persecutions, you will find them all lit up with the evident presence of the Lord with his witnesses. Did the Lord ever fail to support a martyr at the stake? Did he ever forsake one of his testifiers upon the scaffold? The testimony of the church has always been, that while the Lord has permitted his saints to suffer in body he has so divinely sustained their spirits that they have been more than conquerors, and have treated their sufferings as light afflictions. The fire has not been a "bed of roses," but it has been a chariot of victory. The sword is sharp, and death is bitter; but the love of Christ is sweet, and to die for him has been turned into glory. No, it is not God's way to forsake his champions, nor to leave even the least of his children in the trial hour.

As to our Lord, this forsaking was *singular.* Did his Father ever leave him before? Will you read the four Evangelists through and find any previous instance in which he complains of his Father for having forsaken him? No. He said, "I know that thou hearest me always." He lived in constant touch with God. His fellowship with the Father was always near and dear and clear; but now, for the first time, he cries, "why hast thou forsaken me?" It was very remarkable. It was a riddle only to be solved by the fact that he loved us and gave himself for us, and in the execution of his loving purpose came even unto this sorrow, of mourning the absence of his God.

This forsaking was *very terrible.* Who can fully tell what it is to be forsaken of God? We can only form a guess by what we have ourselves felt under temporary and partial desertion. God has never left us, altogether; for he has expressly said, "I will never leave thee, nor

forsake thee"; yet we have sometimes felt as if he had cast us off. We have cried, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" The clear shinings of his love have been withdrawn. Thus we are able to form some little idea of how the Saviour felt when his God had forsaken him. The mind of Jesus was left to dwell upon one dark subject, and no cheering theme consoled him. It was the hour in which he was made to stand before God as consciously the sin-bearer, according to that ancient prophecy, "He shall bear their iniquities." Then was it true, "He hath made him to be sin for us." Peter puts it, "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Sin, sin, sin was everywhere around and about Christ. He had no sin of his own; but the Lord had "laid on him the iniquity of us all." He had no strength given him from on high, no secret oil and wine poured into his wounds; but he was made to appear in the lone character of the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; and therefore he must feel the weight of sin, and the turning away of that sacred face which cannot look thereon.

His Father, at that time, gave him no open acknowledgment. On certain other occasions a voice had been heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; but now, when such a testimony seemed most of all required, the oracle was dumb. He was hung up as an accursed thing upon the cross; for he was "made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"; and the Lord his God did not own him before men. If it had pleased the Father, he might have sent him twelve legions of angels; but not an angel came after the Christ had quitted Gethsemane. His despisers might spit in his face, but no swift seraph came to avenge the indignity. They might bind him, and scourge him, but none of all the heavenly host would interpose to screen his shoulders from the lash. They might fasten him to the tree with nails, and lift him up, and scoff at him; but no cohort of ministering spirits hastened to drive back the rabble, and release the Prince of life. No, he appeared to be forsaken, "smitten of God, and afflicted," delivered into the hands of cruel men, whose wicked hands worked him misery without stint. Well might he ask, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

But this was not all. His Father now dried up that sacred stream of peaceful communion and loving fellowship which had flowed hitherto throughout his whole earthly life. He said himself, as you remember, "Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Here was his constant comfort: but all comfort from this source was to be withdrawn. The divine Spirit did not minister to his human spirit. No communications with his Father's love poured into his heart. It was not possible that the Judge should smile upon one who represented the prisoner at the bar. Our Lord's faith did not fail him, as I have already shown you, for he said, "My God, my God": yet no sensible supports were given to his heart, and no comforts were poured into his mind. One writer declares that Jesus did not taste of divine wrath, but only suffered a withdrawal of divine fellowship. What is the difference? Whether God withdraw heat or create cold is all one. He was not

smiled upon, nor allowed to feel that he was near to God; and this, to his tender spirit, was grief of the keenest order. A certain saint once said that in his sorrow he had from God "necessaries, but not suavities"; that which was meet, but not that which was sweet. Our Lord suffered to the extreme point of deprivation. He had not the light which makes existence to be life, and life to be a boon. You that know, in your degree, what it is to lose the conscious presence and love of God, you can faintly guess what the sorrow of the Saviour was, now that he felt he had been forsaken of his God. "If the foundations be removed, what can the righteous do?" To our Lord, the Father's love was the foundation of everything; and when that was gone, all was gone. Nothing remained, within, without, above, when his own God, the God of his entire confidence, turned from him. Yes, God in very deed forsook our Saviour.

To be forsaken of God was *much more a source of anguish to Jesus than it would be to us.* "Oh," say you, "how is that?" I answer, because he was perfectly holy. A rupture between a perfectly holy being and the thrice holy God must be in the highest degree strange, abnormal, perplexing, and painful. If any man here, who is not at peace with God, could only know his true condition, he would swoon with fright. If you unforgiven ones only knew where you are, and what you are at this moment in the sight of God, you would never smile again till you were reconciled to him. Alas! we are insensible, hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and therefore we do not feel our true condition. His perfect holiness made it to our Lord a dreadful calamity to be forsaken of the thrice holy God.

I remember, also, that our blessed Lord had lived in unbroken fellowship with God, and to be forsaken was a new grief to him. He had never known what the dark was till then: his life had been lived in the light of God. Think, dear child of God, if you had always dwelt in full communion with God, your days would have been as the days of heaven upon earth; and how cold it would strike to your heart to find yourself in the darkness of desertion. If you can conceive such a thing as happening to a perfect man, you can see why to our Well-beloved it was a special trial. Remember, he had enjoyed fellowship with God more richly, as well as more constantly, than any of us. His fellowship with the Father was of the highest, deepest, fullest order; and what must the loss of it have been? We lose but drops when we lose our joyful experience of heavenly fellowship; and yet the loss is killing: but to our Lord Jesus Christ the sea was dried up—I mean his sea of fellowship with the infinite God.

Do not forget that he was such a One that to him to be without God must have been an overwhelming calamity. In every part he was perfect, and in every part fitted for communion with God to a supreme degree. A sinful man has an awful need of God, but he does not know it; and therefore he does not feel that hunger and thirst after God which would come upon a perfect man could he be deprived of God. The very perfection of his nature renders it inevitable that the holy man must either be in communion with God, or be desolate. Imagine a stray angel! a seraph who has lost his God! Conceive him to be perfect in holiness, and yet to have fallen into a condition in

which he cannot find his God! I cannot picture him; perhaps a Milton might have done so. He is sinless and trustful, and yet he has an overpowering feeling that God is absent from him. He has drifted into the nowhere—the unimaginable region behind the back of God. I think I hear the wailing of the cherub: "My God, my God, my God, where art thou?" What a sorrow for one of the sons of the morning! But here we have the lament of a Being far more capable of fellowship with the Godhead. In proportion as he is more fitted to receive the love of the great Father, in that proportion is his pining after it the more intense. As a Son, he is more able to commune with God than ever a servant-angel could be; and now that he is forsaken of God, the void within is the greater, and the anguish more bitter.

Our Lord's heart, and all his nature were, morally and spiritually, so delicately formed, so sensitive, so tender, that to be without God, was to him a grief which could not be weighed. I see him in the text bearing desertion, and yet I perceive that he cannot bear it. I know not how to express my meaning except by such a paradox. He cannot endure to be without God. He had surrendered himself to be left of God, as the representative of sinners must be, but his pure and holy nature, after three hours of silence, finds the position unendurable to love and purity; and breaking forth from it, now that the hour was over, he exclaims, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" He quarrels not with the suffering, but he cannot abide in the position which caused it. He seems as if he must end the ordeal, not because of the pain, but because of the moral shock. We have here the repetition after his passion of that loathing which he felt before it, when he cried, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is the holiness of Christ amazed at the position of substitute for guilty men.

There, friends; I have done my best, but I seem to myself to have been prattling like a little child, talking about something infinitely above me. So I leave the solemn fact, that our Lord Jesus was on the tree forsaken of his God.

II. This brings us to consider THE ENQUIRY, or, why he suffered.

Note carefully this cry—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is pure anguish, undiluted agony, which crieth like this; but it is the agony of a godly soul; for only a man of that order would have used such an expression. Let us learn from it useful lessons. This cry is taken from "the Book." Does it not show our Lord's love of the sacred volume, that when he felt his sharpest grief, he turned to the Scripture to find a fit utterance for it? Here we have the opening sentence of the twenty-second Psalm. Oh, that we may so love the inspired Word that we may not only sing to its score, but even weep to its music!

Note, again, that our Lord's lament is an address to God. The godly, in their anguish, turn to the hand which smites them. The Saviour's outcry is not *against* God, but *to* God. "My God, my God": he makes a double effort to draw near. True Sonship is here. The child in the dark is crying after his Father—"My God, my God." Both the Bible and prayer were dear to Jesus in his agony.

Still, observe, it is a faith-cry; for though it asks, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" yet it first says, twice over, "My God, my God." The grip of appropriation is in the word "my"; but the reverence of humility is in the word "God." It is "'My *God*, my *God*,' thou art ever God to me, and I a poor creature. I do not quarrel with thee. Thy rights are unquestioned, for thou art my *God*. Thou canst do as thou wilt, and I yield to thy sacred sovereignty. I kiss the hand that smites me, and with all my heart I cry, 'My God, my God.'" When you are delirious with pain, think of your Bible still: when your mind wanders, let it roam towards the mercy seat; and when your heart and your flesh fail, still live by faith, and still cry, "My God, my God."

Let us come close to the enquiry. It looked to me, at first sight, like *a question as of one distraught,* driven from the balance of his mind—not unreasonable, but too much reasoning, and therefore tossed about. "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Did not Jesus know? Did he not know why he was forsaken? He knew it most distinctly, and yet his manhood, while it was being crushed, pounded, dissolved, seemed as though it could not understand the reason for so great a grief. He must be forsaken; but could there be a sufficient cause for so sickening a sorrow? The cup must be bitter; but why this most nauseous of ingredients? I tremble lest I say what I ought not to say. I have said it, and I think there is truth—the Man of Sorrows was overborne with horror. At that moment the finite soul of the man Christ Jesus came into awful contact with the infinite justice of God. The one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, beheld the holiness of God in arms against the sin of man, whose nature he had espoused. God was for him and with him in a certain unquestionable sense; but for the time, so far as his feeling went, God was against him, and necessarily withdrawn from him. It is not surprising that the holy soul of Christ should shudder at finding itself brought into painful contact with the infinite justice of God, even though its design was only to vindicate that justice, and glorify the Law-giver. Our Lord could now say, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me"; and therefore he uses language which is all too hot with anguish to be dissected by the cold hand of a logical criticism. Grief has small regard for the laws of the grammarian. Even the holiest, when in extreme agony, though they cannot speak otherwise than according to purity and truth, yet use a language of their own, which only the ear of sympathy can fully receive. I see not all that is here, but what I can see I am not able to put in words for you.

I think I see, in the expression, submission and resolve. Our Lord does not draw back. There is a forward movement in the question: they who quit a business ask no more questions about it. He does not ask that the forsaking may end prematurely, he would only understand anew its meaning. He does not shrink, but the rather dedicates himself anew to God by the words, "My God, my God," and by seeking to review the ground and reason of that anguish which he is resolute to bear even to the bitter end. He would fain feel anew the motive which has sustained him, and must sustain him to the end. The cry sounds to me like deep submission and strong resolve, pleading with God.

Do you not think that *the amazement of our Lord, when he was "made sin for us"* (2 Cor. v. 21), led him thus to cry out? For such a sacred and pure being to be made a sin-offering was an amazing experience. Sin was laid on him, and he was treated as if he had been guilty, though he had personally never sinned; and now the infinite horror of rebellion against the most holy God fills his holy soul, the unrighteousness of sin breaks his heart, and he starts back from it, crying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken *me?*" Why must I bear the dread result of conduct I so much abhor?

Do you not see, moreover, *there was here a glance at his eternal purpose, and at his secret source of joy?* That "why" is the silver lining of the dark cloud, and our Lord looked wishfully at it. He knew that the desertion was needful in order that he might save the guilty, and he had an eye to that salvation as his comfort. He is not forsaken needlessly, nor without a worthy design. The design is in itself so dear to his heart that he yields to the passing evil, even though that evil be like death to him. He looks at that "why," and through that narrow window the light of heaven comes streaming into his darkened life.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Surely our Lord dwelt on that "why," *that we might also turn our eyes that way.* He would have us see the why and the wherefore of his grief. He would have us mark the gracious motive for its endurance. Think much of all your Lord suffered, but do not overlook the reason of it. If you cannot always understand how this or that grief worked toward the great end of the whole passion, yet believe that it has its share in the grand "why." Make a life-study of that bitter but blessed question, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus the Saviour raises an inquiry not so much for himself as for us; and not so much because of any despair within his heart as because of a hope and a joy set before him, which were wells of comfort to him in his wilderness of woe.

Bethink you, for a moment, that the Lord God, in the broadest and most unreserved sense, could never, in very deed, have forsaken his most obedient Son. He was ever with him in the grand design of salvation. Towards the Lord Jesus, personally, God himself, personally, must ever have stood on terms of infinite love. Truly the Only Begotten was never more lovely to the Father than when he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! But we must look upon God here as the Judge of all the earth, and we must look upon the Lord Jesus also in his official capacity, as the Surety of the covenant, and the Sacrifice for sin. The great Judge of all cannot smile upon him who has become the substitute for the guilty. Sin is loathed of God; and if, in order to its removal, his own Son is made to bear it, yet, as sin, it is still loathsome, and he who bears it cannot be in happy communion with God. This was the dread necessity of expiation; but in the essence of things the love of the great Father to his Son never ceased, nor ever knew a diminution. Restrained in its flow it must be, but lessened at its fountain-head it could not be. Therefore, wonder not at the question, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

III. Hoping to be guided by the Holy Spirit, I am coming to

THE ANSWER, concerning which I can only use the few minutes which remain to me. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What is the outcome of this suffering? What was the reason for it? Our Saviour could answer his own question. If for a moment his manhood was perplexed, yet his mind soon came to clear apprehension; for he said, "It is finished"; and, as I have already said, he then referred to the work which in his lonely agony he had been performing. Why, then, did God forsake his Son? I cannot conceive any other answer than this—*he stood in our stead.* There was no reason in Christ why the Father should forsake him: he was perfect, and his life was without spot. God never acts without reason; and since there were no reasons in the character and person of the Lord Jesus why his Father should forsake him, we must look elsewhere. I do not know how others answer the question. I can only answer it in this one way.

"Yet all the griefs he felt were ours,
Ours were the woes he bore;
Pangs, not his own, his spotless soul
With bitter anguish tore.

"We held him as condemn'd of heaven,
An outcast from his God;
While for our sins he groaned, he bled,
Beneath his Father's rod."

He bore the sinner's sin, and he had to be treated, therefore, as though he were a sinner, though sinner he could never be. With his own full consent he suffered as though he had committed the transgressions which were laid on him. Our sin, and his taking it upon himself, is the answer to the question, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

In this case we now see that *His obedience was perfect.* He came into the world to obey the Father, and he rendered that obedience to the very uttermost. The spirit of obedience could go no farther than for one who feels forsaken of God still to cling to him in solemn, avowed allegiance, still declaring before a mocking multitude his confidence in the afflicting God. It is noble to cry, "My God, my God," when one is asking, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" How much farther can obedience go? I see nothing beyond it. The soldier at the gate of Pompeii remaining at his post as sentry when the shower of burning ashes is falling, was not more true to his trust than he who adheres to a forsaking God with loyalty of hope.

Our Lord's suffering in this particular form was appropriate and necessary. It would not have sufficed for our Lord merely to have been pained in body, nor even to have been grieved in mind in other ways: he must suffer in this particular way. He must feel forsaken of God, because this is the necessary consequence of sin. For a man to be forsaken of God is the penalty which naturally and inevitably follows upon his breaking his relation with God. What is death? What was the death that was threatened to Adam? "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Is death annihilation? Was Adam annihilated that day? Assuredly not: he lived many a year afterwards. But in the day in which he ate of the forbidden fruit he died, by being separated from God. The separation

of the soul from God is spiritual death; just as the separation of the soul from the body is natural death. The sacrifice for sin must be put in the place of separation, and must bow to the penalty of death. By this placing of the Great Sacrifice under forsaking and death, it would be seen by all creatures throughout the universe that God could not have fellowship with sin. If even the Holy One, who stood the Just for the unjust, found God forsaking him, what must the doom of the actual sinner be! Sin is evidently always, in every case, a dividing influence, putting even the Christ himself, as a sin-bearer, in the place of distance.

This was necessary for another reason: there could have been no laying on of suffering for sin without the forsaking of the vicarious Sacrifice by the Lord God. So long as the smile of God rests on the man the law is not afflicting him. The approving look of the great Judge cannot fall upon a man who is viewed as standing in the place of the guilty. Christ not only suffered *from* sin, but *for* sin. If God will cheer and sustain him, he is not suffering for sin. The Judge is not inflicting suffering for sin if he is manifestly succouring the smitten one. There could have been no vicarious suffering on the part of Christ for human guilt, if he had continued consciously to enjoy the full sunshine of the Father's presence. It was essential to being a victim in our place that he should cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Beloved, see how marvellously, in the person of Christ, the Lord our God has vindicated his law! If to make his law glorious, he had said, "These multitudes of men have broken my law, and therefore they shall perish," the law would have been terribly magnified. But, instead thereof, he says, "Here is my Only Begotten Son, my other self; he takes on himself the nature of these rebellious creatures, and he consents that I should lay on him the load of their iniquity, and visit in his person the offences which might have been punished in the persons of all these multitudes of men: and I will have it so." When Jesus bows his head to the stroke of the law, when he submissively consents that his Father shall turn away his face from him, then myriads of worlds are astonished at the perfect holiness and stern justice of the Lawgiver. There are, probably, worlds innumerable throughout the boundless creation of God, and all these will see, in the death of God's dear Son, a declaration of his determination never to allow sin to be trifled with. If his own Son is brought before him, bearing the sin of others upon him, he will hide his face from him, as well as from the actually guilty. In God infinite love shines over all, but it does not eclipse his absolute justice any more than his justice is permitted to destroy his love. God hath all perfections in perfection, and in Christ Jesus we see the reflection of them. Beloved, this is a wonderful theme! Oh, that I had a tongue worthy of this subject! but who could ever reach the height of this great argument?

Once more, when enquiring, Why did Jesus suffer to be forsaken of the Father? we see the fact that *the Captain of our salvation was thus made perfect through suffering*. Every part of the road has been traversed by our Lord's own feet. Suppose, beloved, the Lord Jesus had never been thus forsaken, then one of his disciples might have been called

to that sharp endurance, and the Lord Jesus could not have sympathized with him in it. He would turn to his Leader and Captain, and say to him, "Didst thou, my Lord, ever feel this darkness?" Then the Lord Jesus would answer, "No. This is a descent such as I never made." What a dreadful lack would the tried one have felt! For the servant to bear a grief his Master never knew would be sad indeed.

There would have been a wound for which there was no ointment, a pain for which there was no balm. But it is not so now. "In all their affliction he was afflicted." "He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Wherein we greatly rejoice at this time, and so often as we are cast down. Underneath us is the deep experience of our forsaken Lord.

I have done when I have said three things. The first is, you and I that are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and are resting in him alone for salvation, *let us lean hard*, let us bear with all our weight on our Lord. He will bear the full weight of all our sin and care. As to my sin, I hear its harsh accusings no more when I hear Jesus cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" I know that I deserve the deepest hell at the hand of God's vengeance; but I am not afraid. He will never forsake *me*, for he forsook his Son on my behalf. I shall not suffer for my sin, for Jesus has suffered to the full in my stead; yea, suffered so far as to cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Behind this brazen wall of substitution a sinner is safe. These "munitions of rock" guard all believers, and they may rest secure. The rock is cleft for me; I hide in its rifts, and no harm can reach me. You have a full atonement, a great sacrifice, a glorious vindication of the law; wherefore rest at peace, all you that put your trust in Jesus.

Next, if ever in our lives henceforth we should think that God hath deserted us, *let us learn from our Lord's example how to behave ourselves.* If God hath left thee, do not shut up thy Bible; nay, open it, as thy Lord did, and find a text that will suit thee. If God hath left thee, or thou thinkest so, do not give up prayer; nay, pray as thy Lord did, and be more earnest than ever. If thou thinkest God has forsaken thee, do not give up thy faith in him; but, like thy Lord, cry thou, "My God, my God," again and again. If thou hast had one anchor before, cast out two anchors now, and double the hold of thy faith. If thou canst not call Jehovah "Father," as was Christ's wont, yet call him thy "God." Let the personal pronouns take their hold—"My God, my God." Let nothing drive thee from thy faith. Still hold on Jesus, sink or swim. As for me, if ever I am lost, it shall be at the foot of the cross. To this pass have I come, that if I never see the face of God with acceptance, yet I will believe that he will be faithful to his Son, and true to the covenant sealed by oaths and blood. He that believeth in Jesus hath everlasting life: there I cling, like the limpet to the rock. There is but one gate of heaven; and even if I may not enter it, I will cling to the posts of its door. What am I saying? I shall enter in; for that gate was never shut against a soul that accepted Jesus; and Jesus saith, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

The last of the three points is this, *let us abhor the sin which*

brought such agony upon our beloved Lord. What an accursed thing is sin, which crucified the Lord Jesus! Do you laugh at it? Will you go and spend an evening to see a mimic performance of it? Do you roll sin under your tongue as a sweet morsel, and then come to God's house, on the Lord's-day morning, and think to worship him? Worship him! Worship him, with sin indulged in your breast! Worship him, with sin loved and pampered in your life! O sirs, if I had a dear brother who had been murdered, what would you think of me if I valued the knife which had been crimsoned with his blood? —if I made a friend of the murderer, and daily consorted with the assassin, who drove the dagger into my brother's heart? Surely I, too, must be an accomplice in the crime! Sin murdered Christ; will you be a friend to it? Sin pierced the heart of the Incarnate God; can you love it? Oh, that there was an abyss as deep as Christ's misery, that I might at once hurl this dagger of sin into its depths, whence it might never be brought to light again! Begone, O sin! Thou art banished from the heart where Jesus reigns! Begone, for thou hast crucified my Lord, and made him cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" O my hearers, if you did but know yourselves, and know the love of Christ, you would each one vow that you would harbour sin no longer. You would be indignant at sin, and cry,

> "The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er that idol be,
> Lord, I will tear it from its throne,
> And worship only thee."

May that be the issue of my morning's discourse, and then I shall be well content. The Lord bless you! May the Christ who suffered for you, bless you, and out of his darkness may your light arise! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—313, 299, 22 (Part II).

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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THE ROUGH HEWER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 9TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth."—Hosea vi. 4, 5.

VERY simple is the way of salvation: very plain is the road home. The chapter begins with it: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord." By going away from the Lord, we have lost our privileges, have become wounded, and have lost ourselves. To find all these things again we must go back to the Lord, from whom we have wandered. We must cry with the repenting prodigal, "I will arise, and go to my father"; and if we at once begin to carry out the resolve, the way home is not far to seek. Concerning salvation, we need only preach one sermon by way of explanation; but men need ten sermons by way of exhortation. Turn to the right when you come to the cross, and keep straight on, and you will get home, however much you have wandered from the right way.

Alas! too many of our hearers complicate this sweet simplicity. They will not be content to take the plain way; they love more winding paths. They will not drink of the cool flowing waters, but they look for a mingled cup of their own filling. They are waiting: for what are they waiting? They are looking about: for what are they looking? They choose a thorny maze, instead of a straight road. The Lord God, when he is resolved to save, sees it needful to use peculiar methods with these, who will not be satisfied to receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child. Because they will not come when they are bidden, the Lord adds blows to his words. Because they will not come when they are gently drawn, they shall be roughly driven. Because the cords of love and the bonds of a man fail to bring them, they shall have the goad of the ox, and the bit and bridle of the mule. If gentle breezes will not waft the ship, the tempestuous Euroclydon shall force it to the haven. When the Lord resolves to save, he will lay on his chastisement until the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint: he will smite until, from

the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, the body is all wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores. By strong measures and strange methods he will bring back the stray sheep. "Yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him."

It is a great pity that there should be need for these unusual means; for the method of salvation is simple, and if we are willing and obedient, we shall find her ways to be ways of pleasantness. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," is a command which is plain as a pike-staff. The gospel precept is such as a child can understand, and its commandment is not grievous. Alas! men will not follow this path of peace; and even those whom God ordains eternally to save are for many a day most rebellious against his easy plan. Therefore doth God go about, and use all sorts of wise dealings with men, that he may hide pride from them, and may make them willing to accept the humbling terms of salvation by grace alone, through Jesus Christ.

In the case before us, love seems to have reached its nonplus. Infinite love and boundless wisdom seem in this instance to be brought to a dead halt. God has been dealing with Judah and Ephraim in ways as wide as the poles asunder: he has been as a moth, which, without noise, frets the garment, and thus he has caused them a grave disquiet in a gentle and secret manner; but as this sufficed not, he has also turned his lion upon them, and by sharp afflictions and terrible visitations, they have been torn and wounded, as when a wild beast rends his prey in pieces. But neither the gentle nor the terrible has availed; they have remained hardened. What treatment can now be tried? The Lord asks the question. He appeals to those whom he would bless, and puts it to them. Infinite wisdom is pictured as crying in bewilderment, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" What is the next thing? "O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?" What else can be hopefully used, after so many failures? In what terms shall I now address thee? By what methods shall I now attempt to win thee? Ah! it is a thousand pities that the case should ever wear this complexion. Why should the line of love be thrown into such a tangle? For, after all, to-day, at this very moment, the way of salvation is plain, open, and simple to those of you whose cases are most perplexing. All else is intricate, but this is plain; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

Since men will complicate it, the Lord pursues them in his infinite compassion, and follows them despite their devious ways, and double dealings, and inconstancies, and falsehoods. Our text tells us, first, of *the disappointments of love*—"What shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." Secondly, it mentions *the devices of mercy*—"Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth." When we have thought of these two things, we shall be led, very briefly, to notice *the declaration of justice*. If all these ways of long-suffering are despised, God's justice will be abundantly vindicated: "Thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth." The condemnation of those who disappoint love and defy wisdom will be richly

deserved. In closing, we shall, in the fourth place, come back to where we began, and remind you of *the direction of wisdom* which stands before us in the first verse—"Come, and let us return unto the Lord."

I. First, then, THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF LOVE. May the Holy Spirit aid us in this meditation! We have a number of persons about us of whose conversion we have been very hopeful. We know those who for years have presented cheering signs of a gracious work within them, and yet hitherto they have occasioned us grave disappointment. They bud, but they never fruit. Long have they disappointed us, and our fear is that they will disappoint us even to the end.

These people give very speedy promise. We have hardly begun with them; but we feel sanguine of success. Theirs is the religion of haste, but it never speeds. They are as the morning cloud; we have not to wait until evening, but, like the mists on the hills, they are visible before the break of day. Some people are up early, and yet do nothing: such are these. We reckon on them at once, but we reckon wrongfully. We have not preached long before we see tears; we have not talked long before we perceive emotions. We feel sure that the Word of God will not return void from them, for they attend carefully and are moved by the Word as the boughs of the forest are swayed by the wind. It all comes to nothing; but at first the promise hastened as the rod of an almond tree. These are the stony-ground hearers. That scanty soil, with a hard piece of rock below it, no sooner received the seed than, because there was no depth of earth, the seed began to spring up. The same cause which made them so easy come, made them so easy go; for because of the want of root and soil they speedily withered away. Oh, these stony-ground hearers, what a fraud they are! These come by scores to the penitent form; but where are they afterwards? These throng the inquiry room, but never unite with the church. They make a great display of emotion; but it is all a flash in the pan. They are very impressible, but they are as impetuous as they are impressible. They never stop to think, but go for a matter blindly. They never look before they leap; they leap, and then they look, and come to the conclusion to jump back again. They are quick promisers, but slow performers. Thus they act treacherously with God.

These people give striking promises. For the morning cloud was a very striking promise of rain. Looking out of his door in the morning, the Eastern farmer saw a heavy mist hanging over his fields, and he said, "It will rain, and let the Lord be praised, who watereth the hills from his chambers." Very soon he perceived that the sign was not fulfilled; for the dew and the cloud were gone as quickly as they came; but at the time, the tokens were very impressive, and full of hope. So have some of you, my dear hearers, greatly cheered us with a fair prospect of your conversion. You were so broken down under an address that we hoped you were about to display true repentance. You were so pleased to hear the Word of God that we thought you really had received Christ into your heart. You made some very plain and decided remarks, and your life for a while appeared happily altered, so that we and others said, "We trust it

is a work of grace." But you have deceived *us;* and, worse than that, you have dealt treacherously with God in this matter; for you have gone back to your old ways, though you know them to be evil. You yourself thought that you were converted, and you openly avowed that you were so, and you determined to be this, that, and the other; and yet you are none of these things. I will not go into detail about your promises; but I would have you remember that these are so many bonds and notes-of-hand which you have not taken up, and they will be brought out against you at the last great day. We could stand and weep over you, for we know not what to do next. God himself seems to enquire of you, "What shall I do unto thee? what shall I do unto thee? Thy goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

These persons give repeated promises. Though they have failed once, they very freely promise again; though they have failed twenty times, yet they confidently resolve anew. They are always beginning, never going on. The work of a minister with such people is endless. A mason who is hewing stone has hard work enough; the chips fly in his face, and his tool is often worn down; yet when he leaves off at night, he goes on in the morning where he left off. But what would be his toil if what he took off in the day grew again at night? What would the hewer of trees do if the tree grew so fast as to fill up the gashes which his axe had made? This would be a case of labour in vain. Such is my work with many of you, my hearers. Practically, I have to deal with you as I began thirty years ago—if indeed you are not worse. If I were the hewer of timber, I should feel pleasure in the woodman's craft; but if each time I had half felled a tree its wound would heal up, I think I should give up in despair. Yet wherein does this differ from my case with some of you? O my hearers, it is heart-breaking work to seek your salvation; for the more eager we are, the more bitter are the disappointments with which you recompense our loving anxieties. I have said, "Surely that tree will soon fall." But, lo! every mark of the axe is effaced, and the tree looks as if it had never seen a woodman. I wish you had a little consideration for pastors and teachers who desire your eternal welfare; for you send us home lamenting, "Their goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

After all, *these persons do but give us empty promises.* Their vow has no more substance in it than cloud or dew. Shall I show you how it is that they are so quick to promise, and so ready to yield to our persuasions; and yet do not come up to the mark, and carry out their resolves? In some cases they have a very impressible nature. Many men seem made of hard, unworkable metal. I cannot say I am very fond of them, but others are made of very soft metal, and I cannot say that I am any fonder of them. These are your men of willow, easy to bend. These are your lumps of unbaked clay; you can mark them at pleasure with your thumb or your little finger; they are easily affected by their surroundings. Hundreds of these people come to places of worship, and are encouraging till they become disappointing.

Better still, there are many who have a naturally tender conscience.

Such are here now. When you were boys, you could not do wrong without being troubled about it. You have wept yourselves to sleep when you have felt that you grieved your father or mother. What a mercy it is to have a tender conscience! And yet a conscience which is only naturally tender, but has never been renewed by the Spirit of God, may be very deceptive; for we may think we have spiritually repented when we have done nothing of the sort. These people weep about sin, but go on sinning: they desire faith, but remain unbelievers. They soon feel, but they quickly leave off feeling. They are superficial, and hence untrue.

Many are affected by a strong tendency to imitate those about them. We all imitate one another more or less; but evidently many are not born to set examples, but to follow examples: these easily promise, but as easily forget. The love of approbation acts upon many with great force. Especially will young people follow each other, and follow leaders, if they are praised for it. Converts may easily be made by mutual admiration. If it happens to be a religious time, and it is the fashion to profess conversion, many of all ages go with the rush, and yet are by no means truly called into the kingdom of God. That religion which lives upon companionship is apt to die when the company is changed. Beware of the godliness which is carried off its feet by the crowd: true religion is the personal conviction of one who has repented and believed on his own account. No man can be carried to heaven by the stream of outside influence—there must be a work within: "Ye must be born again." No doubt we have many who disappoint our hopes, because they are moving in the right way, but they are not going there from a force within, but are being compelled to go by an influence from without. One person of great strength of mind may have a vast influence over others; but subjection to the best influence can never take the place of personal conversion. We read, in the Word of God, of a young king who did that which was right in the sight of God all the days of the venerable high priest who had been his guardian; but when the gracious man was gone, then the king went his own way, and that way was an evil one. Many persons are under the holy influence of godly relatives and friends, but they are by no means gracious themselves: their real character is concealed by the godly one who overshadows them. Oh, how sad, to be going the right way openly, and yet in heart to be treading the downward road! We are before God what we are in heart, and not what our surroundings compel us to be.

No doubt some give us early promise of better things, because they are under temporary excitement, and hardly know what they say; or they are afraid because of prevailing sickness, or fear of death and judgment. They have no sense of sin, but they feel a fear of hell. They have no wish to escape from doing wrong, but they want to save their skins from the punishment which follows upon wrong-doing. When they are ill they not only send for the doctor, but send for the Christian man to come and pray with them: they send for the doctor because they would be freed from pain, and for the other because they would be freed from hell. Every murderer would, of course, escape the gallows if he could; but this desire is no proof of repentance,

and no sign of reformation. In such cases their goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away.

These people involve themselves in greater sin by breaking their promises; for, according to the seventh verse, these breaches of contract are treacheries to God. "There have they dealt treacherously against me." A man cannot have lived in this world year after year, vowing and promising, proposing and delaying, without hardening his heart in the process. It is perilous to promise faith, and remain in unbelief. I say a man cannot have lived in idle promises and vain resolves without the crimson dye of falsehood soaking into his inmost soul. His very heart and thoughts will become tinctured with a practical untruthfulness and superficiality. Beware of violating your conscience: even once tampering with convictions is like once taking the leprosy. To put down conviction is a species of soul stifling. To drive out a holy thought, and crush a right desire, is spiritual suicide. If you have not carried it to the last degree of actually killing your soul, yet in its essence, every lie to one's soul is a dagger at the heart of its best life. To resist the Spirit of God is a mortal sin, and to quench the Spirit is a capital offence. I cannot, even if I forget his future, look upon any man who has disappointed our just hopes, without a horror of soul that anyone should have acted in this fashion against Almighty God, the God of infinite long-suffering, who has borne with him so long.

II. But I must hasten now to notice, in the second place, with a view to the comfort of some here, THE DEVICES OF MERCY. "Therefore," says the text—what? Therefore I gave them up? Therefore I left them to themselves? No, not yet; but, "Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth." To many men whom God has predestinated unto eternal life it has happened that, after they have long resisted the drawings of divine grace, the Lord has dealt with them in quite another fashion, though with the same end and design.

In this case, according to the text, he hewed them by the prophets; but I have seen the Lord *hew men with cutting providences.* One man would not think till the Lord laid him on a bed of sickness. Even there he tried to brazen it out; but the sickness grew worse, and a more painful disease followed upon the first. He began to be shaken in mind by his pains, especially when he had to lie awake night after night. Depression of spirit followed upon weakness of body; and suddenly the curtain seemed to lift, and the man was compelled to look into the eternal future, black and grim. He had always shunned that sight; but now it haunted him. He who would not think nor care about eternal things began to be exceeding thoughtful and careful about such matters. The Lord was hewing him with personal sickness, and it was of no use for him to attempt to stand out against him. Or, the hewing has been by bereavements. His wife, who was the delight of his eyes, suddenly sickened and died. A little child followed: the darling of the household was laid upon its mother's coffin. When the second stroke came, the man cried, "O God, I cannot bear this! What wouldst thou have me to do?" But he still held out, and continued impenitent. He had one left—

his daughter, the lone star of his life. On a sudden she was taken from him. Then he wept in the bitterness of his spirit, for he was a heart-broken man. In my experience, in dealing with anxious souls, I often meet with men and women who find life through the death of their best beloved. An open grave has been God's doorway to their hearts. The arrows of the Lord have smitten one after another; and, when deprived of earthly lovers, they have turned to the heavenly Friend. They will have reason to bless God to all eternity for those sad days of bereavement wherein the pruning knife cut away from them the wild wood of worldliness and carelessness. How many can say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word"!

The rough hewing has often taken another shape, and has come in the form of loss and impoverishment. The man was getting on wonderfully in business: everything prospered with him, and his increasing wealth ministered to his presumption. He had an excursion for God's day, a jest for God's Word, a contempt for God's house, and an ill word for God's people. But suddenly there came a turn of the tide, and he was carried down stream. He struggled against it; but he found himself hastening to the lower reaches of the river of debt, and drawing near to the sea of bankruptcy. He did not see that the hand of God had gone out against him; but cursed his bad luck, and resolved to fight it out. He had to leave his comfortable house, and live in a very reduced fashion, and he felt it much. But he did not yield. He would find a situation; he would earn his living by harder work. But he could not find a situation: he tramped London in vain, till his bare feet almost touched the stones of the pavement, and his clothes grew ragged about him. Now, the prospect was grim indeed; for no citizen of the far country would even send him into his fields to feed swine. Then it was that he said, "I will arise and go to my Father." The extremity of his want was the opportunity of the good Spirit. If you will not come to God while you have a good coat on your back, I could almost pray that you might come to rags. May a hungry belly bring you, if nothing else will! I am glad to see your worldly estate prosper; but if your soul is perishing, you are in a sad case. Better far that the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stall, than that you should be cut off from Christ, and have no grace in your heart. If some of you are passing just now through very trying providences, I pray with all my heart that they may be sanctified to you. It will be no ill wind which wrecks your ship, if the tempest casts you upon the Rock of Ages. I trust that the Lord is laying you low that he may build you up upon a sure foundation.

With certain others, the Lord does not so much deal with cutting providences as by sharp and convincing *ministries*. Do you not remember, some of you, before you found the Lord, how quietly you heard your minister, and were comfortable and sleepy under him? But the Lord came forth by that ministry against you, and you were sore wounded by it. You had amended your faults, and rectified your life, and you felt very much at ease. The evil spirit had gone out, and the house was empty, swept, and garnished: you were in a very

hopeful and happy condition. Do you recollect that dreadful sermon which, like a bombshell, broke through the roof of your house, and set the whole place on fire? You were very angry, but the deed was done. Sometimes it has been my business, in the name of God, deliberately to break in pieces the choice ornaments of self-righteous men. This has made them feel ferocious. The special things wherein they delighted themselves have been destroyed before their eyes. The ministry has been as a hammer breaking their idols in pieces. Do you not know that the Spirit of God is a destroyer? Is it not written, "The grass withereth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass"? Everything that grows out of human nature is dried up when the Spirit of God blows upon it, and reveals its imperfection. The Holy Spirit is to self-confidence a spirit of judgment, and a spirit of burning. To many it is needful that the Lord's servant should be a rough hewer. Then is a man famous according as he lifts up his axe upon the thick trees. The faithful preacher lops away many a goodly bough, and as the man's natural state is made bare, he cries, "Why is all this? What sharp preaching is this?"

I have known hearers exclaim, "I will never hear that man again. He makes me miserable." Why not hear him again? Do you want him to flatter you? I have no such commission. O my hearers, do you think that I come here on the Sabbath-day, with an anxious heart, aiming at your gratification? Do you think that I play a fiddle that you may dance to it? God forbid that I should so ruin both you and myself! A minister flings his soul away, if he spends his energies in the attempt to please his congregation. It may not be well that some of you should be pleased. Sometimes, when a man grows outrageously angry with a sermon, he is getting more good than when he retires saying, "What an eloquent discourse!" I have never yet heard of a salmon that liked the hook which had taken sure hold of it; nor do men admire sermons which enter their souls. When the Word of God becomes as an arrow in a man's heart, he writhes; he would fain tear it out; but it is a barbed shaft. He gnashes his teeth, he grows indignant; but he is wounded, and the arrow is rankling. The preaching which pleases us may not be truth; but the doctrine which grieves our heart and troubles our conscience, is, in all probability, true; at any rate, there are grave reasons for suspecting that it is so. It is not the way of truth to fawn on guilty men. I say, the Lord uses ministries of a cutting kind to make men uneasy in their sins, and cause them to flee to Christ for peace.

It is well for the preacher to remind men that they are lost by nature, and that in their flesh there dwelleth no good thing. It is well that sin should be made to appear sin, and that self-righteousness should be made to look like filthy rags. Human inability, and the need of the Holy Spirit, must be set forth clearly, and the sovereignty of God must be proclaimed solemnly. The Lord has a right to pass over whom he pleases; but if mercy comes to any man it will be by the sovereign act of God—because God wills to do it, and not because any man deserves it. We must preach the need of cleansing in the precious blood, and the necessity of being born again from above. While the preacher

thunders out the doctrine of death by sin and life in Christ, and other kindred truths, then it is that the Lord hews men by the prophets, and they fall slain by the word of his mouth. "I shall never hope again," says one: "that sermon drove me to despair." Self-despair is the beginning of true hope in Christ. Go and hear that man again. "Oh, but he hung up all my hopes like so many criminals on the gallows." Go and hear him again; for more of that hanging needs to be done, till your last carnal hope is executed. "But he does hit so hard." Thank God he does. There is no hewing stone without hard blows. Oh, it is well to be riddled by the gospel; for God never heals those whom he has not smitten, and he never binds up those who have no wounds. Why should the physician come to those who are not sick? It is to you who are bleeding to death that mercy flies on wings of wind. There shall be no delay when you are at death's door spiritually. Look unto the Lord and live. He waits to heal the wounds he has made.

Beyond this, the Lord uses with many men *very cutting operations within their souls*. They feel spiritual hewings within, which are most terrible. It is my lot almost every day in the week to meet with those who are pressed beneath the heavy hand of conviction of sin. By long experience of the Lord's hewings, I feel at home where the axe has made gaping gashes and the chips lie deep about me. But this is awful work in certain instances, for the tree seems cut down close by the roots. The Holy Spirit comes to some men and makes a discovery to them of what their past lives have been; and oh, the horror of it! They were most respectable people in their own esteem; if not Christians, they were quite as good as the most of those who are, and far better than some: but how soon was this changed! When the Lord puts back a shutter, and lets a little light into the dark room of the soul, what filth and loathsomeness appear where all seemed clean! The Lord does more than that; he takes up the cellar flap and lets the man peer beneath the surface into the dark vault of his heart. What a sink of depravity! What an abyss of deceit! No man's reason would survive a full sight of his own inner self. A cage of unclean birds is nothing to it. The lusts and filthy imaginations, the pride, the wrath, the deceit, the meanness of our natures, who can know them? When we see these hidden evils revealed by the Scriptures we are indeed slain by the word of the Lord's mouth. I have known persons, under horror of sin, try to pray, but prayer has died in their throats. They have read their Bibles, and every chapter has thundered at them. The Word of the Lord has seemed like a red hot harrow full of burning spikes, and it has been dragged up and down the field of their tender hearts. Even the gospel has forgotten its sweetness to their ear. The ambassador of peace has had no kind word for them. I have met with those who have even tried to believe in Christ, but they have been so overloaded with fear that they failed to hope in his mercy. I spoke to one the other day, who said, "Sir, I am spiritually dead." I answered, "Jesus says, 'He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'" He replied that he was without hope, and I reminded him that at one time we also were without Christ and without hope, and yet we were made nigh. "Alas!"

said he, "I have no strength for anything." I bade him remember that it is written, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." "O sir," he said, "you are very skilful to turn things about; but I am lost." "Yes," I said, "and 'the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' If you will describe yourself as a pretty gentleman, I shall find nothing in the Bible wherewith to comfort you; but as long as you have only black words and condemning words wherewith to daub yourself, I feel that you are Christ's man, for you describe yourself just as the Scriptures describe those whom Jesus came to save." Painful as are God's strokes, I rejoice to hear his axe going; for those whom the Lord hews to-day he will help to-morrow. When the Lord is hewing a man, and making him feel that he is nothing and nobody, or worse than that, is making him feel that he is just a heap of sin and misery only fit to be shovelled into the bottomless pit—then I know that salvation is near. When God brings a man down there will soon be lifting up. When the night is darkest, the dawn is nearest. When carnal hope is killed, spiritual hope begins to live.

Thus have we seen the rough methods of tender love, and spied out the devices of effectual grace.

III. And now I have to notice with deep solemnity, for a moment only, THE DECLARATION OF JUSTICE which is placed in the midst of this revelation of mercy. What doth the Word say? "Thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth." Perhaps I address one this morning who has promised fair for heaven, but has deceived everybody, and now God has been dealing with him in another way, and made him feel the axe of affliction—if, after all, he remains obstinate, and will not yield to the love of God, his condemnation will be just. If, despite of all this, he is determined to be lost, God's judgments will be as clear as the light of the morning, or as the flash of lightning in a storm. All you have suffered you have well deserved: you have been brought very low, but it is of the Lord's mercies that you are not consumed. It is true he seems to have smitten you with cruel blows; but had he dealt with you after your sins, and rewarded you according to your iniquities, you would have been where hope can never come. If God had not been longsuffering, you would long ago have been where they ask in vain for a drop of water to cool their tongue, tormented in the flame. It is great mercy that has dealt so unmercifully with your temporal estate. It is great love that has taken away those you love. In any case you have deserved it all, and God's dealings with you are clearly righteous. You cannot question his procedure.

But if all this be in vain, and you pass into another state unsaved, God's eternal judgment against you will be "as the light that goeth forth." Who will plead for you? Methinks I see you in that last dread day. Yes, here he comes! This is the man who knew all about Christ and his precious blood, and salvation by grace through faith! This is he who knew, but did not act as he knew. Who will be his advocate? Here he comes, the man who fifty-two Sundays in the year heard the gospel faithfully preached, and yet closed his ear to it. What excuse has he? Here he comes—the man who was

pleaded with, but would not come: who will lament for him? Here he comes, the man that was the subject of many prayers, and many anxious pleadings; the man that was so near to the kingdom as to be almost persuaded to be a Christian! What can be said for him? For this man so much was done that the Lord said, "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" Mercy itself came to a pause and said, "What shall I do unto thee? What shall I do unto thee?" Surely, it is now the turn for justice to ask the same question. Here he comes, the man on whom the gospel has exhausted all its pleadings, and God's ambassadors have spent all their arguments! Here he comes, and, when the Judge asks him what he has to say in his own defence, what answer can he make? Will it not be another case of, "He stood speechless; and the King said, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"? My God! am I speaking to anyone this morning whose case this will be? I pray, of thy mercy, that it may not be so! If I had the misery of knowing that one soul here would be lost, and if I was bidden to point out the one that should be cast away for ever—how could I bear it? Nay, my Lord, blot my name out of thy book sooner than one of these should perish! I tremble as I stand before you! Yet there are those here who are as unaffected as the seats they sit upon. When such go down to destruction, who shall act as advocate for them? If one would plead for them, what could he say?

> "How they deserve the deepest hell
> Who slight the joys above!
> What chains of vengeance must they feel
> That break such cords of love!"

IV. So, then, I finish with my fourth head, which is not in the text, and yet is the true drift of the text: consider THE PATH OF WISDOM. Leave all I have said, if you please, but listen to the voice which saith, "Come, let us return unto the Lord!" Why should ye be smitten any more, ye will revolt more and more. Why should you be as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle? Why should you be "like dumb driven cattle"? Listen to the voice of wisdom, and be reconciled to God by the death of his Son. "Come, and let us return unto the Lord."

This is *very simple*. So much the better for you. Think of it; nay, practise it. What is the way back to God? The Lord Jesus answers: "I am the way." Take him to be your door of access to the great God on whom you have aforetime turned your backs. Along the blood-besprinkled way of the atoning sacrifice return unto the Lord your God.

Not only are the words simple, but they are *encouraging*. It is put here in a way that ought to cheer you; for others invite you, lest you be afraid to go alone—"Come, and let *us* return unto the Lord." Let us go together. Here, take my hand: I, too, will go to Jesus as a sinner. All of us who have gone to him aforetime, will go to him again with you. Come! Do you hesitate? Come, let us go at once.

Let us go together. We will pray with you, and for you: we know the road, and will point it out to you. You are sitting side by side with your wife this morning, and you are neither of you saved yet. Oh, that the two of you would seize each other's hands and say, "Come and let us return unto the Lord"! And you, brothers and sisters, or you, friends, who know each other well, would it not be a happy thing if, hand in hand, ere you leave this place, you did return unto the Lord? Come! Come! Come! Let us return; why do we linger? Oh, that all here present who have not come back to God by Jesus Christ would come in a great company to the Lord!

Does it seem too bold a thing for you to go back to God? Be not dismayed. Take heart because of the word of *promise*. You cry, "He has torn me: he has wounded me." Yes, that is why you should come to him, for it is written, "He hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." "Look!" cries the sick man, "see what a gash the surgeon made! He has gone away; do you think he will come again to me?" Come again? Of course he will. He must come again. If he made that wound, he had a purpose in it, and he will go through with his design. He has made the open wound because it was necessary to make it, and he has thereby bound himself to attend to you till you are healed. In conviction there is promise of consolation. It is not the nature of our good Lord to cause needless grief. His wounds intend a cure. The Lord, who has broken your heart, will bind it up. The Lord, who has made you tremble at his name, will yet make you rejoice in his salvation. He has said it: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." The Lord will come to you in the grave of despair, and bid you live. Behold his gracious promise, and believe it to be true: "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." May we all live in his sight by faith in Christ Jesus; and to him be glory for ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hosea v. 11—15; Hosea vi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—907, 570, 656.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE WARNINGS AND THE REWARDS OF THE WORD OF GOD.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 16TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."—Psalm xix. 11.

THIS is the declaration of one of God's servants: "by them is *thy servant* warned." Only for men made obedient by divine grace is this passage written. My hearer, are you God's servant? Let us begin with that question. Remember that if you are not God's servant, you are the bond-slave of sin, and the wages of sin is death.

The Psalmist, in this psalm, has compared the Word of God to the sun. The sun in the heavens is everything to the natural world; and the Word of God in the heart is everything in the spiritual world. The world would be dark, and dead, and fruitless, without the sun; and what would the mind of the Christian be without the illuminating influence of the Word of God? If thou despisest holy Scripture, thou art like to one that despises the sun. It would seem that thou art blind, and worse than blind; for even those without sight enjoy the warmth of the sun. How depraved art thou if thou canst perceive no heavenly lustre about the Book of God! The Word of the Lord makes our day, it makes our spring, it makes our summer, it prepares and ripens all our fruit. Without the Word of God we should be in the outer darkness of spiritual death. I have not time this morning to sum up the blessings which are showered upon us through the sun's light, heat, and other influences. So is it with the perfect law of the Lord; when it comes in the power of the Spirit of God upon the soul, it brings unnumbered blessings: blessings more than we ourselves are able to discern.

David, for a moment, dwelt upon the delights of God's Word. He said, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." The revelation of God enriches the mind with knowledge, the heart with comfort, the life with holiness, the whole man with divine strength. He that studies, understands, and appropriates the statutes of the Lord is rich in the truest sense—rich in holiness for this life, and rich in

preparedness for the life to come. Thou hast mines of treasure, if thou hast the Word of God dwelling richly in thy heart. But in the sacred Book we find not only an enrichment of gold laid up, but a present abundance of sweetness to be now enjoyed. He that lives upon God's Word tastes the honey of life—a sweetness far superior to honey; for honey satiates, though it never satisfies, it cloys and never contents. The more thou hast of divine teaching, the more thou wilt wish to have, and the more wilt thou be capable of enjoying. He that loves the inspired Book shall have wealth for his mind and sweetness for his heart.

But David is mainly aiming at the practical; so, having introduced the sun as the symbol of God's Word because of its pleasurable influence, he adds, "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." On these two things we will meditate under the following heads:—First, *their keeping us*—"By them is thy servant warned"; secondly, *our keeping them*—"And in keeping of them there is great reward."

I. First, THEIR KEEPING US: "By them is thy servant warned."

We are in an enemy's country: we are always in danger; we are most in peril when we think ourselves most secure. You will find in the histories of the Bible that the most crushing defeats have fallen upon armies on a sudden, when they were off their guard. The army of Christ has need always to set its pickets and appoint its sentinels, lest the adversary take us unawares. We can never tell when we are likely to be assailed: we shall be wise to assume that we are always surrounded by enemies. God's Word is our keeper, the watcher of our souls; and when a danger is approaching, it rings the alarum and gives us warning. The different parts of Scripture, the statutes, the doctrines, the ordinances, the promises, the precepts—all of these act like pickets to the army, and arouse the Lord's soldiers to resist sudden assaults: "By them is thy servant warned."

In what way does God's Word warn us? In many forms it thus operates. I would say, first of all, *by pointing out sin and describing its nature and danger*. We have here the mind of the Lord as to moral conduct, and so we are not left to guess-work; but we know by unerring teaching what it is that the Lord abhors. Those ten commandments are like lanterns set around an opening in the street, that no traveller may drive into danger. God only forbids that which would injure us; and he only commands that which will be for our lasting good. Spread out before you the law of God, and you may say of it as you read it, "By these commandments is thy servant warned." In my walks I see notices bearing the words "TRESPASSERS BEWARE!" and I am kept from wandering.

It is well to be acquainted, not only with the letter of the law of the Lord, but with the spirit of it. Numberless sins are condemned by the ten commandments: truly we may say of the law of God, "Thy commandment is exceeding broad." All of these are fog-horns warning us of dangers which may cause shipwreck to our souls.

Studying the Word of God, we are made to see that sin is exceeding sinful, since it dishonours God, makes us enemies to our best friend, yea, and drives us madly to destroy our own souls. Sin,

according to God's Word, is murderous: it slew the Saviour of men. Wherever sin comes, death follows it. Sin may bear pleasure in its face, but it has ruin at its heel. Eternal destruction is the finishing of the work of sin. God's Word is very plain and explicit about these grave facts; it forbids our trifling even with the appearance of evil; it warns us against sins of thought and temper, as well as against transgressions of speech and act. He that is graciously familiar with his Bible will be preserved from those pitfalls into which so many have rushed, in their careless contempt of God's Word and holy commandment. A precept of Scripture is like a lighthouse upon a quicksand or a rock; it quietly bids the wise helmsman steer his vessel another way. The whole coast of life is guarded by these protecting lights, and he that will take note of them may make safe navigation; but remember, it is one thing for the Scripture to give warning, and another for us to take it; and if we do not take warning, we cannot say, "By them is thy servant warned." Oh, that our hearts may be in such a state that a hint from the Word may set us on our watch against evil!

Next, the Word of God warns us *by reminding us of our duties.* We are not only taught negatively what we should not do, but positively what we ought to do; and thus we are warned against sins of omission. I wish that professors who are neglectful of many points in the Saviour's example would study his character more, marking down the points wherein they come short of it. If we were to read the lives of holy men recorded in Scripture, and notice wherein we fail to be like them, it might do us much service. Truly, Lord, thy servants would be profitably warned if we oftener enquired, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" Turning over these sacred pages we remark a choice blessing coming upon a man of God, in connection with a certain virtue; then are we warned to cultivate that virtue if we would have that blessing. The Lord does not pay us for our work as though we were hirelings and our labour meritorious; but still, according to his grace he rewards his faithful servants, and so encourages them diligently to obey. Every Bible precept should be an arrow aimed at the heart of our carelessness and forgetfulness. Then should we often say with David, "By them is thy servant warned." Like our Lord in his youth, we must be about our Father's business; and we must continue therein till, like him, we can say, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

The Word of God also *warns us of our weakness in those duties which it commands, and of our tendency to fall into those sins which it forbids.* It sets before us a noble example, but it bids us remember that only by divine power can we follow it. It spreads before us a programme of perfect holiness, but it does not flatter us with the notion that by our own strength we can carry it out. It humbles us by showing that we cannot even pray as we ought without the Spirit's teaching, nor so much as think a good thought without his aid. Scripture is continually warning us of the deceitfulness of our hearts, and of the tendency of sin to advance from one stage of evil to another. Holy Scripture shows us our spiritual inability, apart from the Divine Spirit; and greatly do we need warnings in this way, for we are given to be self-sufficient. Pride will shoot forth with the very least encouragement.

We buckle on our harness, and begin at once to shout as if the battle were won. How soon we think ourselves near perfection when indeed we are near a fall! We are apt to sit down and imagine that we have won the race, whereas we have not yet traversed one half of the way. The Word of God continually checks our carnal confidence, and disturbs our self-satisfaction. It bears constant protest against our imagining that we have already attained, when we are as yet only babes in grace. How plainly it tells us, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool"! It shows us where our great strength lieth; but it calls us off from all trust in our own past experience, or firmness of character, or strength of determination, or depth of sanctification, to lean solely and alone upon heavenly grace, which we must receive hour by hour. If we give way to pride, it is against the admonitions of the divine statutes; for in this matter, "By them is thy servant warned."

So does the Word continually *warn us against the temptations which are in the world in which we live.* Read its story from the first day of Adam's fall to the last chapter of its record, and you shall find it continually representing the world as a place of trial for the heir of heaven. It is indeed as a sieve, in which the true corn has no rest, but much tossing to and fro. Christ seems praying over us every day as we read the Scripture, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." If you fancy that your position in life puts you beyond temptation, you are sadly deluded. Poverty has its evil side, and riches are full of snares. Even in a Christian family we may be seduced into great sin, as well as among the ungodly. There is no place under heaven where the arrows of temptation cannot reach us. With this also comes persecution; for because we are not of the world, the world hateth us. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," is a sure prophecy. If you meet with no persecution, you should remember that the smiles of the world are even more dangerous than its frowns. Beware of prosperity! Thank God if you have the world's wealth; but hold it tenderly, and watch over your heart carefully, lest you bow before the golden calf. Adversity has less power to harm than prosperity. Of the evils peculiar to various positions, the Holy Spirit tells us in these sacred pages: "By them is thy servant warned." We are continually warned to put on the whole armour of God, and not to lay aside the shield of faith for a moment. We are urged to watch at all times, and to pray without ceasing; for in the most quiet life, in the most pious company, and in the regular work of the day, dangers are lurking. Where we think we may be very much at ease, lying down as on a bank of flowers, we are most likely to be stung by the deadly serpent. We are like the first settlers in America: the cunning Red Indians of temptation may be upon us with the deadly tomahawk of lust while we are dreaming of peace and safety.

Here, let me add, *we are warned over and over again against the temptations of Satan.* Certain theologians, nowadays, do not believe in the existence of Satan. It is singular when children do not believe in the existence of their own father: but it is so, that those who are

most deluded by him are the loudest in repudiating all faith in his existence. Any man who has had experience of his temptations knows that there is a certain mysterious personage, invisible, but almost invincible, who goes about seeking whom he may devour. He has a power far beyond that which is human, and a cunning that is equal to that of a thousand of the most clever of men. He will endeavour to influence our minds in a way which is contrary to their true intent; to turn our thoughts in directions which we abhor; to suggest questions about truths of which we are certain, and even blasphemies against him who, in our heart of hearts, we worship lovingly. But, beloved, the power of Satan in a Christian man's life is a force with which he must reckon, or he may fail through ignorance. Some especially have had sore conflict with this evil one, and certain tried ones are scarcely a day without being tormented either by the howling of this dog or else by his snapping at their heels. He cannot possess us as he possesses many of the ungodly; but he worries whom he can't devour with a malicious joy. Whatever "modern thought" ministers may have to say about him, the inspired Scripture does not leave us ignorant of his devices, but sets us on our guard against his terrible power, bidding us pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One." The temptations of the world, and of the flesh, are more upon our level than the assaults of Satan: he is the prince of the evil forces, and his attacks are so mysterious, so cunningly adapted to our infirmities, and so ingeniously adjusted to our circumstances, that unless the Lord the Holy Spirit shall daily cover us with his broad shield of grace, we shall be in the utmost jeopardy. O Lord, by these words of thine is thy servant warned to resist the enemy and escape his wiles! Glory be to thy loving care!

The teachings of the Lord also *warn us to expect trial.* The Bible never promises the true believer an easy life: the rather does it assure him that he is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. There is no soaring to heaven on the wings of luxurious ease: we must painfully plod along the pilgrim way. We see on the page of inspiration that we cannot be crowned without warfare, nor honoured without suffering. Jesus went to heaven by a rough road, and we must follow him. Every believer in the cross must bear the cross. If things go easily with you for a long time, do not, therefore, say, "My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved"; for God has only to hide his face, and you will be troubled. Those happiest of men, of whom it could be said that God had set a hedge about them and all that they had, these, in due course, had to take their turn at the whipping-post and smart under the scourge. Even Job, that perfect and upright man, was not without his troubles. Beloved, expect to be tried; and when the trial comes, count it not a strange thing. Your sea will be rough, like that which tossed your Lord. Your way will be hot and weary, like that which your Master trod. The world is a wilderness to you, as it was to him. "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." Seek not to build your mansion here; for a voice cries to you out of the Word, "This is not your rest, for it is polluted." Think of that verse of our favourite hymn—

"Why should I complain of want or distress,
Temptation, or pain? He told me no less.
The heirs of salvation, I know from his Word,
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord."

Therefore, beloved, you are forewarned that you may be forearmed.

God's Word also warns us by prophesying to us of things to come. I cannot enter just now into what is a very interesting point of experience, namely, the singular fact that the Bible is used of God to warn individuals of events about to occur to them. The Book is full of prophecies for nations, but at times it becomes prophetic to individual believers. Have you never had impressed upon your mind a passage of Scripture which has followed you for hours, and even days, and you could not tell why, till an event has happened which has so exactly tallied with that Scripture, that you could not but remark it, as having prepared you for the circumstance? Will not your morning reading sometimes forestall the sorrow or the duty of the day? Have you not often found that if you read the Bible consecutively, somehow or other, the passage which comes in due course, will prove to be as truly a lesson for the day, as if it had been written on purpose to meet your case? I am far from being superstitious, or wishful to encourage faith in mere impressions, but I cannot shut my eyes to facts which have happened to myself. I know that I have received, through this Book of God, messages to my heart, which have come with peculiar power and suitability; so that I have been compelled to say, with emphasis, "Moreover by them is thy servant warned."

But the Bible warns us all of certain great events, especially of the Second Advent of the Lord and the coming judgment. It does not clearly tell us when our Lord will appear, but it warns us that to the unprepared he will come as a thief in the night. It warns us of the general judgment, and of the day when all men shall live again, and stand before the great white throne. It warns us of the day when every secret shall be revealed, and when every man shall receive for the things that he has done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil. "By them is thy servant warned." If I live like one of yonder cattle, in the immediate present, if I have no eye for the future that is hurrying on, if my soul never places herself in vision before the judgment-seat of Christ, if I never foresee the day when heaven and earth, before the presence of the great Judge, shall flee away; why, then I cannot be a diligent reader of the Word of God. If I search the Scriptures I shall be called to walk in the light of the last day, and shall be made to gird up my loins to face the dread account. Oh, that we might all be warned to be ready, that we may give in our account with joy! Oh, that we may so take the warnings of holy writ as to be ready for death, ready for judgment, and ready for that final sentence which can never be reversed! If we were truly wise, these warnings would put salt into our lives, and preserve them from the corruption which is in the world through lust.

Beloved, I trust that every one of us who knows the Lord will use his holy Book as the constant guard of his life. Let it be like a fog-signal to you, going off in warning when the road is hidden by a cloud. Let it be like the red lamp on the railway, suggesting to

you to come to a stand, for the road is dangerous. Let it be like a dog at night, waking you from sleep because a robber is breaking in; or as the watch on board a ship, who shouts aloud, "Breakers ahead!" Let the Word of God be like one who, during the great flood in America, rode on a white horse down the valley, crying out, as he rode along, "To the hills! To the hills! To the hills!" The waters were following fast behind him, and he would have the people escape to the mountains, lest they should be destroyed. O precious Book, thus bid me seek the hills! Ring the alarm bell in my ear, and compel me to flee from the wrath to come. Day and night, wherever I may be, may a word from the oracle of God sound in my ears, and keep me from sleeping on the brink of the abyss! May no enemy be able to steal upon us when sleeping in false security; for it is high time that we awake out of sleep; and this Book tells us so.

So far have we spoken upon the Word as keeping us.

II. And now, secondly, I have to speak to you upon OUR KEEPING THE WORD OF GOD.

"In keeping of them there is great reward." What is meant by keeping the testimonies of God's Word? You know right well that it will not suffice to have the holy Book in your houses, to lie upon the table, so that visitors may see that you have a family Bible. Nor is it enough to place it on the book-shelf where the dust may thickly cover it, because it is never used. That is not keeping the Bible, but burying it. It does not warn you, for you smother it; you do not keep it, for you dishonour it by neglect. You must have a reverent esteem for it, and a growing familiarity with it, if you would keep it. "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly."

To keep the Word of God is, first of all, *earnestly to study it* so as to become acquainted with its contents. Know your Bible from beginning to end. I am afraid there is but little Bible searching nowadays. If the Word of God had been diligently studied there would not have been so general a departure from its teachings. Bible-reading people seldom go off to modern theology. Those who feed upon the Word of God enjoy it too much to give it up. Comparing spiritual things with spiritual, they learn to prize all revealed truth, and they hold fast the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Dear young people, if you never read a single book of romance you will lose nothing; but if you do not read your Bibles you will lose everything. This is the age of fiction, and hence the age of speculation and error: leave fiction, and give yourself wholly to the truth. Eat ye that which is good, and spend not your money on that which is not bread. The Bible is the Thesaurus of heavenly knowledge; the Cyclopædia of divine science: read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the same, and then you will be keeping the sayings of God.

But we cannot keep them without going further than this: *we must be zealous in their defence.* May it be said of each one of us, "Thou hast kept my word." When you find others denying God's truth, hold you the faster to it. When they argue against it, be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. It is not an easy task to stand fast in the faith to-day; for the current which runs towards unbelief is strong as a torrent, and many have

been taken off their feet by it, and are being carried down to the cataracts of error. May God help you to say with the pilgrims in Vanity Fair, "We buy the truth"! Buy it at any price, and sell it at no price. It ought to be dearer than life, for it was so to the martyrs of our own country, and to the Covenanters of Scotland, in whose steps we would tread. They cared little whether their heads were struck off or no; but they cared everything for King Jesus and the statutes of his Word. Beloved, happy in the end will that man be who for a while has suffered contempt, and misrepresentation, and separation from his brethren, because of fidelity to the truth of God! Come what may, he that sides with truth will be no loser in the end. Oh, for more Luthers nowadays: we want them! Those who truckle to error are everywhere: even those in whom we trusted have betrayed their Lord.

But this is not all, we must get much further: *there must be a careful observance of the law of the Lord.* We cannot be said to keep God's Word if we never carry it out in our own lives. If we know the commandments, but do not obey them, we increase our sin. If we understand the truth and talk about it, but are slow to live according to it, what will become of us? This is not to keep God's Word, but to hold the truth of God in unrighteousness. This may, in some cases, be a presumptuous sin. When thy knowledge far exceeds thy practice, take heed lest thou be guilty of sinning wilfully. We must keep the Word of God in the sense in which our Lord used the word when he said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

Once more, even this is not enough: we are to keep the truth of God, not only by reverent study of it, by zealous propagation of it, by careful observance of it, but also by *an inward cleaving to it in love*, and a cherishing of it in our heart of hearts. What thou believest thou must also love if thou art to keep it. If it come to thee in the power of God, it may humble thee, it may chasten thee, it may refine thee as with fire; but thou wilt love it as thy life. It will be as music to thine ear, as honey to thy palate, as gold to thy purse, as heaven to thy soul. Let thy very self be knit to the faithful Word. As new-born babes desire the unadulterated milk, so do thou desire the teachings of the Spirit, that thou mayest grow thereby. Every word of God must be bread to us, after which we hunger, and with which we are satisfied. We must love it even more than our necessary food. For that which God has spoken, we must have an ever-burning, fervent love, which no floods of destructive criticism can quench, or even damp.

But now the text says, "In keeping of them there is great reward"; and here you must have patience with me while I set out *the great reward which comes to obedient believers.* There are many rewards, and the first is, *great quiet of mind.* "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them." When a man hath done what God bids him do, his conscience is at peace; and this is a choice boon. I can bear anybody to be my foe rather than my conscience. We read of David, "David's heart smote him." That was an awkward knock! When a man's own conscience is his foe, where can he run for shelter? Conscience smites home, and the wound

is deep. But when a man can conscientiously say, "I did the right thing; I held the truth; I honoured my God"; then the censures of other men go for little. In such a case, you have no trouble about the consequences of your action; for if any bad consequence should follow, the responsibility would not lie with you: you did what you were told. Having done what God himself commanded you, the consequences are with your Lord, and not with you. If the heavens were likely to fall, it would not be our duty to shore them up with a lie. If the whole church of God threatened to go to pieces, it would be no business of ours to bind it up by an unhallowed compromise. If you should fail to achieve success in life, as men call success, that is no fault of yours, if you cannot succeed without being dishonest. It will be a greater success to be honest, and to be poor, than to grow rich through trickery. If, through grace, you have done the will of God, your peace shall be like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Can you think of a greater reward than this? I cannot. A quiet conscience is a little heaven. A martyr was fastened to the stake, and the sheriff who was to execute him expressed his sorrow that he should persevere in his opinions, and compel him to set fire to the pile. The martyr answered, "Do not trouble yourself, for I am not troubling myself. Come and lay your hand upon my heart, and see if it does not beat quietly." His request was complied with, and he was found to be quite calm. "Now," said he, "lay your hand on your own heart, and see if you are not more troubled than I am; and then go your way, and, instead of pitying me, pity yourself." When we have done right we need no man's pity, however painful the immediate consequence. To do right is better than to prosper. A heart sound in the truth is greater riches than a houseful of silver and gold. There is more honour in being defeated in the truth than in a thousand victories gained by policy and falsehood. Though fame should give you the monopoly of her brazen trumpet for the next ten centuries, she could not honour you so much as you will be honoured by following right and truth, even though your integrity be unknown to men. In keeping the Word of the Lord there is great reward, even if it bring no reward. The approbation of God is more than the admiration of nations. Verily this is great reward.

The next great reward is *increase of divine knowledge*. If any man will know the will of Christ, let him do that will. When a young man is put to learn a trade, he does so by working at it: and we learn the truth which our Lord teaches by obeying his commands. To reach the shores of heavenly wisdom every man must work his passage. Holiness is the royal road to Scriptural knowledge. We know as much as we do. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." It may be, you sit down and consider the doctrine, but you cannot understand it. You turn it over and consult a learned divine; but still you cannot understand it. Be obedient, pray for a willing heart to do the will of God, and you have already received enlarged capacity, and with it a new light for your eyes: you will learn more by holy practice than by wearisome study. The Lord help us to follow on to know the Lord, for then shall we know! Practice makes perfect. Obedience is the best of schools, and love is the aptest

of teachers. To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, is the gift of grace to the faithful: is not this a great reward?

Moreover, in keeping the commandments *we increase in conformity to Christ, and consequently in communion with God.* He that doeth as Christ did is like Christ; for our likeness is moral and spiritual. In measure we receive his image as we work his deeds; and then, as Christ lived in constant fellowship with God, because he did always the things that pleased God, so do we walk in the light, as God is in the light, when we yield obedience to the divine will. If thou walkest in sin, thou canst not walk with God. If thou wilt be obedient, then shall all clouds be chased away, and thy light shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. Sinning will make you leave off communion with God, or else communion with God will make you leave off sinning: one of the two things must occur. If thou be kept from sin and made to be obedient, thou shalt bear the image of the heavenly, and with the heavenly thou shalt have daily intercourse.

This will be followed by the fourth great reward, namely *power in prayer.* Jesus says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." If you will read in the Gospel of John, you will frequently see how success in prayer is, in the case of the believer, made to depend upon his complete obedience. If thou wilt not hearken to God's Word, neither will he hearken to thy word. Some people complain that they have no power with God: but has God any power with them? Look to the faultiness of your lives, and cease to wonder at the failure of your prayers. An inconsistent life downstairs means unprofitable prayer upstairs—if indeed there be any prayer at all. You cannot have God's ear in the closet if he never has your ear in the shop. If you live as worldlings live, the Lord will treat you as he did Cain, to whose offering he had no respect. Wonder not at your leanness in private devotion, if there is license in your public life. O Lord God the Holy Ghost, sanctify us in our daily lives, so shall we obtain access to God through Jesus Christ, and our pleading shall be accepted in him.

One great reward is *habitude in holiness.* The man who has, by divine grace, long kept the way of the Lord, finds it more easy to do so, because he has acquired the habit of obedience. All things are difficult at the beginning, but all things grow easy as we proceed. I do not say that holiness is ever easy to us: it must always be a labour, and we must always be helped by the Holy Spirit; but at the same time, it is far easier for a man to obey who has obeyed, than for one to obey who has lived in constant rebellion. If thou hast faith, thou wilt have more faith almost as a necessary consequence. If thou prayest much, thou wilt pray more: it is all but inevitable that thou shouldst do so. There are believers whom the Lord has put on the rails of life; they do not run on the road, like common vehicles; but they are placed on tram lines of habit, and so they keep the ways of the Lord. Sometimes a stone gets into the rails, and there is an unhappy jolt; but still they do no iniquity, but keep on in one straight line even to their journey's end. This is a great reward of grace. If you are obedient, you shall be rewarded by being made more obedient. As the diligent workman becomes expert in his art,

so shall you grow skilful in holiness. Use is second nature. What a joy it is when holiness becomes our second nature, when prayer becomes habitual as breathing, and praise is as continual as our heart-beats! May hatred to sin be spontaneous, and may desire for the best things be the habit of our soul! I scarcely know of a greater reward than this habitude of holiness which the Lord in his grace bestows on us.

This will generally be followed by another great reward, namely, *usefulness to others*. He that keepeth the commandments of the Lord will become an example that others may copy, and he will wield an influence which shall constrain them to copy him. Do not you think that many Christians are spiritually childless because they are disobedient? How can God give me to bring others to himself if I myself backslide from him? The power to bless others must first be a power within ourselves. It is useless to pump yourself up into a pretended earnestness at a meeting, and then to think that this sort of thing will work a real work of grace in others: the seed of pretence will yield a harvest of pretenders, and nothing more. Nothing can come out of a man unless it is first in him; and if it is in him it will be seen in his life as well as in his teaching. If I do not live as I preach, my preaching is not living preaching. I could indicate men of great talent who see no conversions; and one does not wonder, for in their own lives there is no holiness, no spirituality, no communion with God. I could mention Christian people, with very considerable gifts, who have no corresponding measure of grace, and hence their labour comes to nothing. Oh, for more holiness! Where that is manifest there will be more usefulness.

Lastly, we shall have the great reward of *bringing glory to the grace of God*. If we are made holy, men, seeing our good works, will glorify our Father who is in heaven; and is not this the very end of our existence? Is not this the flower and fruit of life? I pray you, therefore, walk humbly and carefully with God, that he may be honoured in you.

There are two things I want to say before I sit down. The first is, *let us hold fast, tenaciously, doggedly, with a death grip, the truth of the inspiration of God's Word*. If it is not inspired and infallible, it cannot be of use in warning us. I see little use in being warned when the warning may be like the idle cry of "Wolf!" when there is no wolf. Everything in the railway service depends upon the accuracy of the signals: when these are wrong, life will be sacrificed. On the road to heaven we need unerring signals, or the catastrophes will be far more terrible. It is difficult enough to set myself right and carefully drive the train of conduct; but if, in addition to this, I am to set the Bible right, and thus manage the signals along the permanent way, I am in an evil plight indeed. If the red light or the green light may deceive me, I am as well without signals as to trust to such faulty guides. We must have something fixed and certain, or where is the foundation? Where is the fulcrum for our lever if nothing is certain? If I may not implicitly trust my Bible, you may burn it, for it is of no more use to me. If it is not inspired, it ceases to be a power either to warn or to command obedience. Beloved,

others may say what they will, but here I stand bearing this witness: "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

While you hold fast its inspiration, *pray God to prove its inspiration to you.* Its gentle but effectual warning will prove its inspiration. This precious Book has pulled me up many times, and put me to a pause, when else I had gone on to sin. At another time I should have sat still had it not made me leap to my feet to flee from evil or seek good. To me it is a monitor, whose voice I prize. There is a power about this Book which is not in any other. I do not care whether it be the highest poetry, or the freshest science; each must yield to the power of the Word of God. Nothing ever plays on the cords of a man's soul like the finger of God's Spirit. This Book can touch the deep springs of my being, and make the life-floods to flow forth. The Word of God is the great power of God; and it is well that you should know it to be so by its power over you. One said, "I cannot believe the Bible." Another answered, "I cannot disbelieve it." When this question was raised: "Why cannot you disbelieve?" the believer answered, "I know the Author, and I am sure of his truthfulness." There is the point; if we know the Author, we know that his witness is true, and knowing it to be true, we take his warnings, and follow his commands. May the Lord work in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure; then shall the Book be more and more precious in our eyes; and this sense of its preciousness will be one of the rewards which come to us in keeping the statutes of the Lord. So be it unto you through Christ Jesus! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xix.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—908, 479, 19.

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POSSESSING POSSESSIONS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 23RD, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions."—Obadiah 17.

THIS is a remarkable passage. Its wording is singular. It begins with a "but," because the previous verses have been denouncing judgments upon Edom. When God comes forth to punish his enemies, he also comes forth to bless his friends. When Pharaoh is overthrown in the Red Sea, it is that Israel may pass onward to Canaan. When Amalek is overcome, it is that Israel may be at peace. There is a black cloud, as well as the silvery rain. The acceptable year of the Lord is the day of vengeance of our God. This combination so constantly occurs that the Psalmist said, "I will sing of mercy and judgment." The sword of vengeance is displayed at the same time as the sceptre of grace. In that last great day, that coming of the Lord, which is the joy and expectation of his people, will be confusion to his adversaries. To the ungodly, "the day of the Lord will be darkness, and not light." When he cometh forth, there will as surely be a curse to the left hand as a blessing to the right, and both will be everlasting. Hell is as deep as heaven is high; for God, who delighteth in mercy, also hateth iniquity, and will put away the wicked of the earth like dross. God grant to you and to me that we may know on which side we stand, and may be found in Christ, wearing his righteousness, accepted in the Beloved, so that whenever the Lord cometh forth with plagues for his adversaries, he may have a favour towards us. When, in the words of verse sixteen, his foes "shall be as though they had not been," may the full force of the present text be revealed in our case: "But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions."

I make no doubt that this promise has been fulfilled already, and that there was a time when the house of Israel, restored from captivity, came back to Zion, and Edom was utterly consumed. "The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it." But the former fulfilment of a

promise does not make it useless, like a cheque which has been paid: the promise may be presented again, and it will again be honoured. God's rules of action are immutable, and hence what he did to one company of his people he will do to others of them. God is a sovereign, but yet he acts according to his unchanging nature, so that from one of his proceedings we may infer the rest. The temporary restoration of the captives to Jerusalem can only have fulfilled the promise upon a very small scale: it has a wider meaning than such an event could exhaust. The Lord is prepared to do the same on a larger scale for all those who put their trust in him. Taking the text as containing a general principle, I shall use it for our own encouragement and edification, praying God the Holy Spirit to make it truly useful.

I notice, in the text, first, *a privilege to be desired*—"The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions"; secondly, *a favour to be remembered*—"Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance"; and, thirdly, *a character to be conspicuous*—"And there shall be holiness."

I. First of all, consider A PRIVILEGE TO BE DESIRED. The land of Canaan had been granted to Israel by the Lord of all. Each family had a lot and portion which belonged to it for ever, being entailed upon it by a covenant of salt. Through their sins, the tribes were carried into captivity, the land was taken from them by their conquerors, and they could no longer possess their possessions. Now, the promise comes to them by the prophet Obadiah: "The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." A property may be my lawful possession, and yet, for divers reasons, I may not be able to get at it: it may be in the hands of one who defrauds me of it, or I may be far away and unable to reach it. The words are singular, but their meaning is distinct: "They shall possess their possessions."

Let us use the words as applicable to *souls who shall be led to take what is promised to believers*. "The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." We set before many of you, every Sabbath-day, the great possessions of eternal life, of pardon, of justification, of the new birth, sanctification, and all the other treasures of the covenant; but though they are set before you, and you long after them, many of you feel unable to grasp them as your own. You know that the tenure of these possessions is faith; but either you do not understand what faith is, or you, for some other reason, fail to exercise it, and so you do not appropriate what the gospel freely gives to you. You are either confused by ignorance, or dazed by fear as to your sin, or held back by the temptations of the devil. I pray that you may have grace speedily to take what Jesus freely gives, so that you may come to possess your possessions. If you have the power given you to-day, by faith, to take the Lord Jesus Christ as yours, and if you now trust in his most precious blood, you need not be afraid that you will be taking possession of what does not belong to you, for every believing soul may know that what he takes by faith was bestowed upon him in the covenant of grace from before the foundation of the world. If thou believest in Christ, thou wast chosen of God before the world began. For believers, redemption was specially offered by our Lord upon the cross; he bought for them the covenant heritage, and he has made it over to them, so that it shall be theirs

for ever. You cannot know this before you believe: but faith reveals the divine choice and gift. You who now believe were once strangers to such an extraordinary joy as that which comes by faith. You wandered up and down in sin, knowing nothing of what free grace and dying love had done for you: but now you have come to God, and you have ventured by faith to take possession of what the Lord so freely offers in the gospel: and behold, it is revealed to you that these things were yours in the purpose of God, even from everlasting. Now is it fulfilled to you—"The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." God gave you all covenant blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he chose you, in him, from before the foundation of the world. God saw you in Christ as his elect, his beloved, his redeemed, and therefore for you he prepared a kingdom which you inherit through his grace. If you have now the confidence to believe in Christ Jesus, and to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," then you shall know that in grasping gracious blessings, you do but come to your own; you possess your possessions. Let it be the prayer of everyone here, who by faith has entered into rest, that others may now be brought in, that so the number of the elect may be accomplished, and that all covenant provisions may be received by those for whom they are prepared. Oh, for the bringing home to their God and to their own possessions those who are now prodigals, starving in the far-off country!

Let us go a step further. Beloved friends, many by faith have laid hold upon the covenant possessions, but yet they do not to the full possess them. The text leads me to pray that *believers may enjoy fully what they have grasped by faith.* Christ is mine; but, beloved, who among us knows all that is ours in Christ? He is a casket, which is all ours, but we do not open its doors, and take out all its treasures. Our possessions in Christ are very wide; but we need to be bidden, like Abraham, to lift up our eyes to the north, and to the south, and to the east, and to the west, that we may form a clearer idea of the goodly land which the Lord our God has given us. We see the blessings of the covenant; but do we feed on them as we might? Do we drink deep into them, and is our soul satisfied as with marrow and fatness by them? I fear we do not by enjoyment possess our possessions. Alas! with many believers, times of actual realization and enjoyment are rare: they can talk about the blessing, but they do not habitually rejoice in it themselves. "Oh, yes," they say, "it is a very delightful thing to be washed in the blood of the Lamb." But do they enjoy the peace which flows from cleansing? Have they "received the atonement," and with it that peace with God which follows upon justification by faith? Do they delight in "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"? You know, dear brethren, that it is your high privilege to have access to the mercy-seat; but do you use that access, and come often and boldly to the throne of grace? Do you avail yourselves of your opportunities? Do you make the utmost use of prayer? In other holy matters, do you really stand where God would have you stand? Are you as rich as Christ has made you? A man may have large possessions, and yet be practically poor, because he is miserly in his expenditure. Is it not so with many a child of God? All things are ours, and yet we live as if

nothing were ours. Like a horse shut out of the pastures, we nibble round the hedges: better far for us to be like sheep, which enter in and lie down in green pastures. Oh, for grace to appropriate by enjoyment those treasures of the covenant, which make the soul to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory! I pray that we may not look in at the windows of the banqueting hall, but may sit at the table and possess our possessions. Why should we be hungering and thirsting, when Christ has given us his flesh to be meat indeed, and his blood to be drink indeed? Why should we be hanging down our heads like bulrushes to-day, when the Lord loves us, and would have his joy to be in us, that our joy may be full? Why are we so dispirited by our infirmities, when we know that Jehovah is our strength and our song, he also has become our salvation? I tell you, brethren, we do not possess our possessions. We are like an Israelite who should say, "Yes, those terraces of land are mine. Those vineyards, and olives, and figs and pomegranates are mine. Those fields of wheat and barley are mine; yet I am starving." Why do you not drink the blood of the grapes? He answers, "I can scarcely tell you why, but so it is —I walk through the vineyards, and I admire the clusters, but I never taste them. I gather the harvest, and I thrash it on the barn-floor; but I never grind it into corn, nor comfort my heart with a morsel of bread." Surely this is wretched work! Is it not folly carried to an extreme? I trust the children of God will not copy this madness. Let our prayer be that we may use and enjoy to the utmost all that the Lord has given us in his grace, and so possess our possessions.

Go a step further. We possess our possessions *when we hold firmly what we enjoy*. Too many Christians hold their blessings with a feeble hand; they expect where they ought to enjoy, and think where they ought to know. They are never sure, and thus they do not "possess their possessions." They are not sufficiently at home with spiritual things to be said to possess them. At times, they rise into rapturous joy; I think I heard one of them sing the other day—

> "My willing soul would stay
> In such a frame as this;
> And sit and sing herself away
> To everlasting bliss."

But the brother very soon came down from that mount; the sister soon quitted that Tabor, and made her way to the place of Wailing. Why this fickleness? Some do not stay long enough in the garden of assurance to see a single fruit ripen; they do not possess their possessions. It is a grand thing when the grace of God enables a man to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." When happy feelings vanish, faith abides the same. Be it night or be it day, our soul waits only upon God; for our expectation is from him. When you have such a grip of the eternal covenant, that if all the devils in hell were to try to drag it from you you would defy their efforts, it is well with you. We know that we have passed from death unto life. We know that Christ is ours, and that we are his. We are resting in him, and are saved in him with an everlasting salvation. Who shall

separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord? When we are thus assured, we then really possess our possessions: our title deeds are before us, and the inheritance is within sight of our faith. If a man is living in a house which does not belong to him, he can hardly be said to possess it. He may be at any moment disturbed, if not ejected altogether. If one who can prove his claim comes that way, out he must go. Beloved, our God has given us a covenant right in Christ Jesus to the blessings of his grace: we cannot be ejected; justice is on our side as well as grace, since Jesus died. Our tenure is not uncertain: because Jesus lives we shall live also. Blessed is he who, having believed in the Lord Jesus, is able to sing,

"Now I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes."

May this be the lot of all the members of this church, and of all my Lord's servants in every place!

I have not come to the end of my tether yet. I will fix another meaning upon these words, and apply them to *souls realizing things to come.* Brethren, we have possessions which we have not yet seen, and cannot as yet enter upon.

"I have a heritage of joy
Which yet I must not see;
The hand that bled to make it mine
Is keeping it for me."

We believe in the Second Coming of our Lord from heaven, and in the glory that shall follow. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, and the eternal bliss of the godly in heaven. We believe that we shall dwell with Christ for ever and ever. Can we possess these possessions even now? We cannot now rise from the dead, for we are not yet buried; we cannot yet walk the golden streets, for we have not passed through the gate of pearl. Yet, by the realizations of faith, we may make these things to be so near that we may measurably enjoy them even now, and so already possess our possessions. "He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Though we are not actually in heaven, yet in union with our Lord we are virtually there. We have been buried with him in baptism, wherein also we have risen with him. We have been raised from spiritual death into newness of life, and we have gone up above all earthly things into the heavenlies, wherein we dwell. Yes, beloved, faith has a strange realizing faculty. Imagination can do much in this direction, but faith can do far more. By imagination a man can make fiction appear fact: faith has nothing to do with fiction, but it makes the sure hopes of the future to be the pleasures of the present. Earth can become the vestibule of heaven; life here may be the rehearsal of the glory-life above. Even here we may possess our possessions by enjoying a period of rest, "as the days of heaven upon the earth." Already we have the earnest of the

inheritance in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and we have obtained that inheritance in Christ.

"The men of grace have found
Glory begun below;
Celestial fruits on earthly ground
From faith and hope do grow."

More and more may we enjoy the peace, the rest, the purity, the victory of heaven, and thus possess our possessions.

One other meaning, and upon this I am going to lay emphasis: we long to see *souls winning others for Jesus*. I think when it says, "The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions," it may also mean the possessions of their enemies. For, in the nineteenth and twentieth verses, we read—"They of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south." The saints annex the territories of their enemies, which are theirs in Christ Jesus. The whole world belongs to Christ, and in his name we are to possess it for him. As yet we see not all things put under him; but the enemy abides in his strongholds. Ah, how terribly does the enemy keep his hold on London! Beloved, we long that this text may prove true to us by our achieving the capture of this great city. "There is very much land yet to be possessed," and we must press on our conquest in the name of Jesus. We must carry the war into the enemy's country, and storm fort after fort for Jesus. This land is a part of Christ's own kingdom; let us take it. Is this to be done? It must be done! We must not be satisfied till millions bow at our Lord's feet—until Jesus, by the grace of God, possesses the east and the west, the north and the south. I regard this as a promise to us: "The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." Drunkenness must come down, like Jericho before the trumpets of Israel; sin and lechery, like the iron chariots of the Canaanites, must be broken in pieces before our holy faith; unbelief and superstition, like the hosts of Jabin, must give way before the everlasting gospel, which must and shall conquer. Oh that the whole church would be up and doing for the Lord our King! Oh, for a dauntless faith, to go up and possess the gate of our enemies! This is one of God's great designs. He has chosen us and brought us to Zion, that there we may find deliverance for ourselves, and then may lead others to the Deliverer. Is it not written in the twenty-first verse, "And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's"? If we have been chosen of God we have been chosen with this object, that we gather out from the world the rest of the Lord's redeemed, and win for our King the nations now in revolt against him. Many of us are, just now, praying day and night that this may be our best year, that we may have a larger increase than ever before. I invite you all to join with me in this continual

supplication, and may it come to pass before our own eyes, that, in this Tabernacle, "the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions."

II. So much upon the main part of our discourse: there are two other things to be handled, and, first, comes this—A FAVOUR TO BE REMEMBERED: "Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance." This fact should help us to possess our possessions. See what God has done for us! What can he not do? Is anything too hard for the Lord? That you may see the force of the passage, let me work out its meaning.

We have been saved; for "Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance," and we have found it so. In Christ Jesus we have been saved. The Revised Version has it, "In mount Zion there shall be those that escape." We have escaped from sin, death, and hell. One of the greatest expositors of the Minor Prophets reads it, "Upon mount Zion there shall be an escaped remnant," which indicates a people small and weak, but effectually rescued; and such are we. This rendering reminds us of that other prophet, who said, "In mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call" (Joel ii. 32). Glory be to God! We are saved. Delitzsch reads it, "Upon mount Zion will be that which has been saved." Yes, we have been saved, saved from spiritual death, saved from punishment, saved from sin itself, saved unto the glory of our God! We have been saved, not on mount Sinai, for there the law thunders terribly; but on mount Zion, where the blood of sprinkling speaketh better things than that of Abel. Because of this deliverance, let us go up and publish salvation, and proclaim the name of our Deliverer. Hearken unto his voice, ye captives, that ye also may be delivered! Look to him, ye perishing, that ye also may be saved! Now may we cheerfully possess our possessions, since we are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

We are daily saved; for the text says, "Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance." Salvation abides there at all times. Not only have we been saved, but we are saved continually from all evil. If we fall into trouble at any time, we fly to Jesus. If we have hourly temptations, we look to Jesus for hourly succour. We have present salvation. Let us not think of our salvation as a matter which was finished in us on a certain day, and there and then ended. Conversion is the beginning of sanctification, and sanctification is the life-long working out of salvation. Grace will always be needed from day to day, until we enter into glory. In mount Zion, in Christ Jesus, in the Word, and in the church of God, there is a fountain of salvation which never dries up. If it be so, let us enjoy it without stint, now and always. Let us be rich in abiding treasure. Let us be happy in never-failing safety, and let us seek to bring this deliverance to others.

We are few, comparatively. I reminded you of that reading of the text—"Upon mount Zion shall be an escaped remnant." I will not make guesses as to what the number of God's chosen will be in the end; but at present, taking the most charitable view of things, the saved ones are as a handful of corn on the top of the mountains, or as the gleanings of the vintage. The world lieth in the wicked one, but those who are in Christ Jesus are a small remnant. That cheering

word, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," is still applicable to the church. When we accept the most enlarged notion of the numbers making up the church of God at the present day, and compare that slender company with the population of the globe, it is like comparing a drop of the bucket to the laver of the temple. Ah, me! Yet let us not despair: if God has saved us, though we be but few, he will accomplish his purposes by us. He saveth not by many nor by few: his own right arm getteth unto him the victory. Ye are able to possess the land, few as ye are. Only go forth in the same spirit as the twelve did when the Holy Ghost rested upon them at Pentecost; and few as you may be, you can yet subdue the nations to Christ.

We are chosen by grace. In mount Zion the escaped remnant are men chosen by grace, and ordained unto this deliverance. If you believe that God has chosen you, nothing should daunt you. More courage comes into the heart through a grip of the doctrine of election than by any other truth. Let a man believe that God has ordained him to this or that, and he goes forward with irresistible resolve. The man impressed with his election crashes through every difficulty, as though he were a bolt of iron, shot from some tremendous cannon by a master marksman. Who shall hinder my accomplishing that to which God has appointed me? I shall fulfil my destiny: who shall hinder me? In this there is a mighty motive for pressing on to possess our possessions, and win for Christ the purchase of his blood. "The remnant hath obtained it." The victory remains with the people whom the Lord has chosen.

Notice this, that we are *set for the deliverance of others.* The Lord's purpose of grace to any man does not end with the personality of that one man. He chooses one man with a view to others. When God chooses a company of men to eternal life, it is that they may be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jehovah chose Israel that the favoured nation might receive the oracles of God and preserve them for the ages to come. If he has chosen us and brought us to his mount Zion, it is that, finding deliverance for ourselves, we may go forth and bear the tidings of it to the ends of the earth. Is it not written, "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"? Brethren, we ought to go in and possess the land and win the people for Jesus, for therefore are we chosen. Has he saved you? Has he taken you out from among the fallen mass of mankind? Has he chosen you by his discriminating grace? Oh! then, you are not your own, you are his for ever, and you are not to live for yourselves, but for his glory and for the making known of his salvation among your fellow men; wherefore, beloved, take heart and courage, and let your souls be big with high enterprise and noble purpose. Say to yourselves, "It shall be true, 'the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions,' for we know of a truth that there is deliverance upon mount Zion."

III. Our final word is perhaps the most important of all. I call your attention to a third matter, namely, THE CHARACTER TO BE CONSPICUOUS. "Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and *there shall be holiness.*" It is through holiness that the house of Jacob shall enter

into that possession of which I have spoken at so great length. If there be no holiness, then there has been no deliverance, and there shall be no possessing of possessions. Holiness is a link which is essential to the golden chain of blessings. If we are without holiness, we shall not see the Lord on our side.

To give you the bearing of the words before us, I remark, first, that it might be translated, "Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and *there shall be a sanctuary*," or, "a holy place," an inviolate sanctuary of God. The people of God are the temple of God. The church of God should be God's peculiar dwelling-place, wherein he walks as a king in his own palace. The temple of the Godhead, is, first of all, the person of Christ, and next the church of the living God. "This is my rest; here will I dwell, for I have desired it." With what dignity is the church invested, when it is in very deed the temple of God! When we come together in our solemn gatherings, and especially when we surround the communion table, and are visibly seen as a church, let us be filled with solemn awe and holy trembling; for the Lord is among us as he was in Sinai, or, better still, as he was in the holy of holies in the Tabernacle of old. True saints are living stones of the living temple wherein the Lord Jehovah deigns to make himself known. Unless we can realize this, we shall not possess our possessions. If your church membership is a mere trifle to you; if you think that a church is simply a community of people who meet together for religious purposes, you miss the mark. The church must be the sanctuary of God—the place where God reveals himself; and if it is not so, the men and women who make up that church have never tasted the divine deliverance, neither will they possess their possessions. Without the presence of God in the church, it has no power to subdue the world to the faith.

The great thing that makes God's people a holy people, is *the presence of God with them*. He sanctifies both the place of his abode and those that come near to him. It is holy ground where Jehovah reveals himself, though it be but in a bush. God is everywhere; but he is not everywhere as he is in his church. There is a special, gracious presence of God in the midst of his chosen people; and this it is that makes them "holiness unto the Lord." Have you never been forced to cry with Jacob, "How dreadful is this place!" and that because you had also cried, "Surely God was in this place!" In a gathering of saints, when you have drawn near in solemn prayer to God, and have laid hold upon the covenant angel and prevailed, have you not felt that you were the Lord's? We are never so holy as when we are near to God. God's overshadowing presence sanctifies the man whom it covers. Beloved, we must have this, or we cannot conquer the nations. If God is not with us, and the shout of a King is not in the camp, there will be no brave deeds done in the battle. The church needs reviving at home. We hear men talk of "getting up a revival." What idle talk is this! If the church of God becomes spiritually quickened, the revival will come; but not else. Let us carefully see to our holiness, and God will see to our success.

Next to this, *there must be holy teaching:* "there shall be holiness." All the teaching that goes forth from us must be God's holy truth, and

not the dream of human wisdom. If I hear of a ministry under which there are no conversions, I usually find that it is not a holy ministry. If in the teaching there is nothing which is calculated to convert sinners, we cannot wonder that it is not used to that end. If I go fishing with a broken net, is it any wonder that I take no fish? God could not convert souls by unholy sermons, for it would not be to his glory to do so. Instrumentality must be fitted for what it aims at, and soul-saving sermons must deal with sin and salvation, and with the blood of Jesus. What have we to do with themes which are foreign to our design? If I were to come hither and talk to you about Strikes, or Home Rule, or Socialism, and should then pray to God to convert souls by my discourse, would it not be a mockery or worse? I think so. Zion must have holy preaching if she is to have conquering power. Whatever our ministry lacks, it must be said of it, "There shall be holiness," or there will be death in the pot. Oh, that the preacher might always be holy! Unless we preach a holy God, a holy doctrine, a holy gospel, and holy practice, we sow the wind.

Beloved, we must maintain *holy ordinances*. God forbid that we should put a slight upon baptism and the supper of the Lord! Some have rejected these sacred institutions; but how will they answer for it in the day when Christ shall come? If the Lord Jesus has ordained these institutions, how dare we set them aside? Surely this is presumptuously mounting to the throne of Christ, pushing him from the seat of legislation, and daring to make laws for ourselves. No; there shall be holiness, and then we shall possess our possessions, and find in the ordinances means of instruction and usefulness.

There must be holiness in the form of *holy pleading*. If this church, which has enjoyed so much of divine favour, could be in every member aroused to mighty intercession for the souls of men, should we not see great things? If every member were in earnest in praying for the visitations of God; and if every one pleaded day and night for the display of divine power, and added to his pleading that which would prove it to be sincere, namely, his own individual effort, what a day would break upon us! It would be a morning without clouds! I see no reason why it should not be so. I pray it may be realized at once. May our ideal become a fact! May God himself fulfil the promise, "There shall be holiness"! Holiness will breed prayer, and prayer will bring power, and that power will work mightily for the glory of the Lord.

One thing more—*there must be holy living*. Prayer meetings: what are they if they are held by a number of people who do not serve the Lord at home? Preaching: what is that, if the preacher preaches what he has never experienced, and is not prepared to practise? Teaching in Sabbath-schools: what is that, if the children are taught by frivolous persons, whose lives are destitute of piety? God will not bless us, to the effecting of his purposes of salvation, unless we are clothed with holiness as with a garment. Zion's priests must put on their snow-white garments of holy living if they are to offer an acceptable sacrifice before Jehovah. If I might plead on my knees with tears in my eyes, I would beseech every brother and sister here to be holy. Hear how the Lord says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

"Be ye imitators of God as dear children." "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh." "Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." You cannot possess your possessions to your own joy, unless your lives are holiness unto the Lord. You cannot have full assurance, you cannot rise to close communion with Christ, you cannot anticipate the joys of heaven, you cannot be useful to men, unless you carefully obey the Lord, and walk in holiness before him. Our hearts can truly pray—

"Yet one thing we want,
More holiness grant,
For more of thy mind
And thy Spirit we pant."

If this panting be fulfilled, all things will go well with us.

Suffer the word of exhortation. As we so eagerly desire that we may have a great increase to this church through numerous conversions, let us lay this to our hearts, that we must be holy; for if we are not holy we shall not be fit to be blessed. *The unholy worker is not really in earnest.* He may have a factitious or fictitious earnestness; but heart-passion for souls is not found in unholy men. Unless you are thoroughly consecrated to God, and then sanctified by the Spirit, you will not speak with that accent of conviction which carries truth home to the hearer. Do you not know yourselves that when you have listened to a clever preacher who has no spirituality, but is a mere actor and known to be of worldly habits, his preaching has no power in it for you? What he said was all very well, but it fell flat: he was a clever and eloquent man, but he did not touch you. When I heard George Müller, some years ago, there was nothing of oratory in what he said, but then there was George Müller behind it, and every syllable had weight. That blessed man spoke as one who had experience of what he said. His long life of faith in God made every word powerful with the heart and conscience. Teachers of Bible-classes and schools, a holy life must be your power in your classes, or your words will be to your children as idle tales!

If they see your lives to be unholy, *the ungodly will reject your testimony*, and it will be no wonder that they do so. They want to reject it; they are looking out for excuses for rejecting it, and they will gladly find an argument in your unhallowed conversation. They will say, "The man does not believe it himself, or else he would not live as he does." I heard of one who was asked by her minister whether she remembered last Sunday's sermon. "No," she said, "it is all gone." "But you ought to remember it," said the minister. "No," she replied, "I am not to be expected to do so, for you did not remember it yourself—you read it all from a paper." The argument is, if the preacher does not remember his own preaching to put it into practice, how can he expect others to do so? Shall the taught excel the teacher? Brother, you lose your leverage of power if you fail in holiness.

What is more, *saints cannot pray for a blessing on a work which is not holy.* If you work for God in an unholy way, or work for God rightly, yet, nevertheless, are inconsistent in your ordinary life, the people

of God will be grieved, and will find it impossible to pray for you. "Ah!" said one to me, talking of his minister, of whom I was sorry that he should have so to speak, "*You* may well have a blessing, for God's people love to pray for *you;* but as for our minister, he is a fine preacher, but there is nothing gracious about him, and none of the Lord's people feel drawn to him." This is a grievous loss to a man; a leak which will sink his ship. Can any good come of a ministry for which saints cannot pray? Unless the people of God see in a man downright consecration to God, and holiness of spirit and life, they cannot feel that union of heart which produces intercession.

Lastly, *God himself will not own a ministry which is not accompanied by holy character.* How can God set his seal to an unholy life? Ah, brothers! if we can go into the world and sin as others do all the days of the week, it will be in vain to pull over us the garb of sanctity on the Sunday, and say, "I am witness for Christ." What does God think of such conduct? Does he call on evil men to be his witnesses? He hates hypocrisy, and therefore he cannot append the "signs following" to a ministry which is impure. O my brethren, we desire honour from the Lord in conversions. We would not be as Saul, when he laid hold on Samuel, and cried, "Honour me before the people!" All the honour which rhetoric and oratory could bring, would be nothing to us if we did not see souls saved.

O you that are not yet believers in Jesus, how much I wish that you were so! May you be led to believe at once in him whose death must be your life, who must himself be your salvation. Look to him and live! And you that are Christ's, I beg you to remember the remarkable expression of the text, and may you "possess your possessions"! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xliv.

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C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious."—1 Peter ii. 7.

HERE we have no far-fetched statement: it belongs to every-day life. Those now present who believe can verify it on the spot: as believers, they can tell us whether the Lord Jesus is precious to them or not. We are not now about to consider an abstruse doctrine, or lose ourselves in a profound mystery of the faith; but we have before us an assertion which even a babe in Christ may put to the test. Yes, you who but last week confessed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, can tell in your own souls whether he is precious to you or not.

If you can personally verify this sentence, it says a great deal for yourself. You need never raise the question as to whether you have the faith of God's elect, and are true believers in Jesus; for if Christ is precious to you, that question is answered once for all by this statement, which covers the whole ground—"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious." The converse of the statement is equally true: you who find Christ precious have true faith in him. It is important, while looking at this word of the apostle Peter, that we should lay our hands upon our hearts, and ask—Do I know what this means? Is Jesus more to me than gold, or any other thing that can be desired? Can I truly say—

> "Yes, thou art precious to my soul,
> My transport and my trust:
> Jewels to thee are gaudy toys,
> And gold is sordid dust"?

If I can so testify, then I have proved my own possession of saving faith.

Dear friends, if we can verify this statement, it is not only satisfactory to ourselves, but it is glorifying to our Lord. Certain men are best respected where they are least known. Many a character needs distance to lend enchantment to the view; but our Lord is most precious to those who are best acquainted with him. Those who are actually trusting him, and thus putting him to the test, are those who

have the highest opinion of him. If you would have the best estimate of the Lord Jesus, we refer you to those who have had transactions with him on the largest scale, to those who cast all their care upon him for time and eternity. Their proof of him is so satisfactory that he is more and more esteemed every day. He is far more precious to them than when they first heard of him, and every thought of him makes him dearer to their hearts. What a glorious friend is he who is most precious to those who receive most from him! Usually men feel sadness at an increase of obligation; but in this case, the more we are his debtors the more we rejoice to be so. Thousands here this morning can say, "I believe in him, and he is precious to me beyond all compare." O my unbelieving hearer, is there no weight in this testimony? If those that believe in Christ uniformly declare that he becomes more and more delightful to them, should it not persuade you to trust him? If large numbers of Christians were met with who turned round, after a few years, and confessed that they had been deceived, and that, when the novelty was worn off, there was really nothing precious about the Lord Jesus, then unbelievers would be justified in their unbelief. But if it be not so, but the very reverse, what shall I say to you who will not consider the claims of Jesus? Why do you continue to refuse a Saviour to whom so many bear witness? I can truly say, our witness is not forced, it is joyfully spontaneous, and we are glad to bear it on all occasions, and in any company. If we do so unanimously—and I am sure we do—you ought to be convinced of the truth of our statement; and if your judgment were not perverted by sin, you would be convinced, so that you would resolve to believe in Jesus, even as we believe. Do you despise our testimony—the testimony, in many instances, that of your own father, and mother, and friend? No, you are not so ungenerous as to call us all liars or fools. I pray you, therefore, give practical weight to the evidence, by believing in Jesus, and he will be to you as precious as he is to us. This is but common-sense. May God give you grace enough to follow the dictates of ordinary prudence, for these would certainly lead you to do what others have found to be so great a blessing to them.

Coming at once to the text, we shall consider *what Christ is to his people;* according to our text, he is "precious." Secondly, consider *what it is in them which makes them so greatly to value their Lord:* "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious." It is their faith which apprehends the preciousness of Christ, and without it Jesus would never be precious in their eyes. Thirdly, consider *what they receive from him.* This thought arises out of another translation of the text, more strictly accurate than the one we use: "Unto you therefore which believe he is honour." The Lord Jesus sheds honour and glory upon those who believe in him. May that honour be ours! Oh, for the aid of the Holy Spirit in this promising meditation!

I. First, consider WHAT CHRIST IS TO HIS PEOPLE. We read in our own Version, "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious"; yet the word is not an adjective, but a noun. Hence the Revised Version reads the text, "For you therefore which believe is the preciousness." His very self is preciousness itself. He is the essence, the substance,

the sum of all preciousness. Every believer will subscribe to this; many things are more or less precious; but the Lord Jesus is preciousness itself, outsoaring all degrees of comparison.

How do believers show that Christ is thus precious to them? They do so by trusting everything to him. Every believer stays his hope solely upon the work of Jesus. With regard to the past, the present, and the future, he finds rest in Christ. The Lord Jesus is the casket into which we have put all our treasures, and we prize him accordingly. All our affection flows toward him as all our hope flows from him. Within his sacred name and person all our expectation is contained. He is all our salvation and all our desire. Despite the homely proverb, we have put all our eggs into this one basket: all our stores are in this one ship. We have no reserve: we have deposited with our Lord everything which concerns us, and we have no secondary trust wherewith to supplement his power or love. We have committed to him our all, and we know that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him till that day. As the Advocate who alone pleads the causes of our soul before the living God, our Lord is most precious to us. Our implicit faith in him proves our high estimate of him.

To believers the Lord Jesus is evidently very precious, because they would give up all that they have sooner than lose him. Martyrs and confessors have actually given up all for Jesus times without number: history bears this witness abundantly. Tens of thousands have renounced property, liberty, and life, sooner than deny Christ. To this day we have among us those who dare to go forth into the fever country for his name's sake, not counting their lives dear unto them that they might spread abroad his gospel. I hope that we also could part with everything sooner than separate from our Lord. We would, like the holy children, if the choice lay between apostasy and the fiery furnace, reply, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter." Let all things go, but we must hold fast our Lord. Brother, could you give up your Saviour? Very dear to you are your children, and your wife, and your friend; but if it really came to the point to give these up or the Lord Jesus, I am sure you could not hesitate. It is a desirable thing to be esteemed and respected by one's fellows; but when it comes to this, that for the truth's sake one must be an outcast, and become the butt of enmity, there must be no question. Popularity and friendship must at once be sacrificed. Believer, you would far sooner take up your cross, and go with Jesus, than take up your crown, and go away from him. Is it not so? We must not speak too confidently, and declare that we would never deny him; but yet he knows all things, and he knows that we love him so truly that for his sake we could suffer the loss of all things, and count them but dung, that we might win Christ, and be found in him. This proves that our Lord is precious, since all else may go to the bottom so long as we can keep our hold on the Well-beloved.

Saints also find their all in him. He is not one delight, but all manner of delights to them. All that they can want, or wish, or conceive, they find in him. To the believer "Christ is all." His desires go not beyond the landmarks of his all-sufficiency. When

saints have outward good, they enjoy Jesus in it; and when outward good is gone, they find it in him. That which to a man is all things is in the most emphatic sense "precious"; and Christ is that to every believing soul.

So precious is Jesus to believers that they cannot speak well enough of him. Could you, at your very best, exalt the Lord Jesus so gloriously as to satisfy yourself? I make free confession, that I never preached a sermon about my Lord which came anywhere near my ideal of his merits. I am always dissatisfied when I have done my very best. I have often wished that I could rush back to the pulpit, and try to preach him better; but I am kept back from such an attempt by the fear that probably I might fail even more conspicuously. He is so glorious as to be glory itself. Who can describe the sun? He is so sweet in our apprehension that we cannot convey that apprehension to another by such feeble expressions as words. Our thoughts of the Lord Jesus Christ are far, far below his worth; but even those thoughts we cannot communicate to another, for they break the backs of words. Language staggers under the weight of holy emotion which comes upon us in connection with the Lord Jesus. We can never say enough of God's unspeakable gift. On any other subject there is danger of exaggeration, but it is impossible here. If thou findest honey, it is well to eat cautiously of it, for it may pall upon thee; but when thou findest Christ, take all in thou canst, and pray for an enlarged capacity, for he will never cloy. When thou beginnest to talk of what thou hast tasted and handled concerning Jesus, speak with an open mouth, and give thy tongue unbounded liberty. Thou needest now no bridle for thy lips. Rather let a live coal from off the altar burn every bond, and set thee free to speak at large of him who is still as far beyond thee as the heavens are above the earth.

Saints show that in their estimation Christ is precious, for they can never do enough for him. It is not all talk: they are glad also to labour for him who died for them. Though they grow weary *in* his work, they never grow weary *of* it. Have we not heard them sigh for a thousand tongues, that they might sing the dear Redeemer's praises as they should be sung? Do they not often wish that they had ten thousand hands, yea, ten thousand bodies, that they might be in a thousand places at once, seeking to glorify their Well-beloved? If they could have their utmost wish as to his glory, and lay down all at his feet, even then they would be dissatisfied, and feel themselves to be infinite debtors to their loving Lord. Oh, that we could crown him with infinite glory! Oh, that we could set him on a glorious high throne among men, where every soul could see him, love him, and adore him! What great things saints have tried to do for Christ! yet never one of them has expressed any satisfaction with what he has done; but all have mourned over their shortcomings, and wished that they could devise a tribute more equal to his deserts.

Saints show how precious Christ is to them, in that he is their heaven. Have you never heard them, when dying, talk about their joy in the prospect of being with Christ? They have not so much rejoiced because they were escaping the woes of this mortal life, nor even because they would rest from their toils, but because they would

behold the Lord. Often have we seen the eye sparkle, as the dying believer said, "I shall see the King in his beauty before many hours have passed." When saints quit the world, their last thought is that they shall be with their Redeemer; and when they enter heaven, their first thought is to behold his glory. To believers Jesus is heaven. The Lamb is the light, the life, the substance of heavenly bliss.

"Not all the harps above
Could make a heavenly place,
If God his residence remove,
Or but conceal his face."

We long to be with Christ. Many of us could say with David, "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire." Christ is to us the covenant, and in him we find the foundation of our first hope, and the topstone of our highest joy. Is he not, indeed, precious to us?

If you are not satisfied with these proofs that Christ is precious to believers, I would invite you, my dear brother and sister, to add another yourself. Let every one of us do something fresh by which to prove the believer's love to Christ. Let us not be satisfied with proof already given. Let us invent a new love-token. Let us sing unto the Lord a new song. Let not this cold world dare to doubt that unto believers Christ is precious: let us force the scoffers to believe that we are in earnest.

In thinking Christ to be precious, the saints are forming a just estimate of him. "He is precious." For a thing to be rightly called precious, it should have three qualities: it should be rare, it should have an intrinsic value of its own, and it should possess useful and important properties. All these three things meet in our adorable Lord, and make him precious to discerning minds. As for rarity: talk not of the rarity of gold or of gems—he is the only one: he is absolutely unique. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid. He is the one sacrifice for sin. Not the infinite God, nor all the wealth of heaven, could supply another like him. As God and man, he alone combines the two natures in one person. "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." If we can never find another like him, after searching all the ages through, we may well call him precious. It is also most clear that he is intrinsically valuable —who shall estimate his worth? I should darken counsel by words without knowledge if I were to attempt in detail to tell you what he is. Only dwell on the simple fact, that while he is God over all, and has thus the fulness of the Godhead, he is also man, true man of the substance of his mother, and so has all the adaptation of perfect manhood. "Consider how great this man was." Not even heaven itself can be compared with Christ Jesus. He is incomparably, immeasurably, inconceivably precious. As for useful qualities, where else shall we find such a variety of uses in one place? He is eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame, healing to the sick, freedom to the slave, joy to the mourner, and life to the dead. Think of his life, and how it gives life to the believer! Think of his death, and how

it redeems from hell all those who trust in him! Think of his resurrection, and how it justifies believers; and of his second coming, and how it delights our hearts! Think of our Lord in all his offices, as Prophet, Priest, and King! Think of him in all his relationships, as husband, brother, friend! Think of him under all the types and figures with which Scripture delights to set him forth! Think of him in all positions and conditions, think of him as you will, and as you can; but in every one of these, he has a blessed use for the supply of some terrible need which afflicts his redeemed. He is set for the removal of your condemnation, the pardon of your sin, the justification of your person, the changing of your nature, the presentation of your offerings, the preservation of your graces, the perfecting of your holiness, and for all other good and necessary purposes. All good things meet in him, and meet in him in profusion, even to superabundance; wherefore, he is precious indeed!

The saints form their estimate of him upon Scriptural principles. They are not so fanatical as to be carried away by mere passion; they can be brought to book, and they can give a reason for their estimate. The text puts it, "Unto you *therefore* which believe he is precious." We have a "therefore" for our valuation of Christ: we have reckoned and calculated, and have reason on our side, though we count him to be the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. We can justify our highest estimate of our dear Lord and Saviour.

Observe the run of the context. Our Lord Jesus is very precious to us as "a living stone." As a foundation he is firm as a stone; but in addition, he has life, and this life he communicates, so that we also become living stones, and are joined to him in living, loving, lasting union. A stone alive, and imparting life to other stones which are built upon it, is indeed a precious thing in a spiritual house which is to be inhabited of God. This gives a character to the whole structure. Our Lord is, in fact, the source of all the life which fits the church to be a temple for the living God. We see that Christ in the church is the centre and crown of it: he is as precious to it as the head is to the body. Without Christ we are useless stones, over which men stumble, and dead stones without feeling or power; but in him, being quickened with a heavenly life, we are builded together into a habitation of God through the Spirit. Solomon's temple was a mere thing of earth as compared with the spiritual house which God constructs out of those who are made alive by contact with the living stone.

I may add that our Lord is all the more precious to us because he was "disallowed indeed of men." Never is Christ dearer to the believer than when he sees him to be despised and rejected of men. We do not follow the fashion; we know not the broad road and its crowds; and hence the Lord Jesus is immeasurably glorious to us when we see that the world knew him not. Did they call the Master of the house Beelzebub? then we the more heartily salute him as Lord and God. Did they charge him with drunkenness, madness, and with being a friend of publicans and sinners? We bow at his feet with all the lowlier reverence and love. Did they spit upon him? Did they scourge him? Did they blindfold him, and then mock him? Ah! then he is to our souls all the

worthier of adoration. Crown ye the Crucified! As the sun at noonday is he when nailed to the cross and reviled by the ribald crowd. Now is he glorious in our eyes, while scribes and Pharisees make jests around him, and he dies in agony. Worship him, all ye glorified ones! Yet we feel as if worship fit for him upon the throne did not reach the height of his desert when we see him on the accursed tree. Here would our reverence sink lower than ever, and our praise would rise above angelic adoration. Precious is our Lord Christ as we see him going up to the tree, bearing our sins in his own body. Precious is he when forsaken of God, and discharging all our debt by his dread sacrifice. Unto you that believe he is all the more precious because he is still disallowed of men.

He becomes inconceivably precious to us when we read the next words, and view him as "chosen of God." God has chosen the man Christ Jesus to be our Saviour. Upon whom else could the divine election have fallen? But he saith, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people." The choice of Jehovah must be divinely wise. Infinitely prudent is the choice of him whom he hath exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour. O glorious Christ, chosen of God, well mayest thou be chosen of us! If thy Father's heart is set on thee, well may ours be! To us thou art precious.

Note well that the apostle calls him "precious," that is, precious to God. We feel abundantly justified in our high esteem of our Lord, since he is so dear to the Father. He never looks with such delight on any as he does upon his own Son. Three times he spoke it out in words: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Father finds full rest in his Only-begotten. God finds in him union and communion, as in "one brought up with him," who was "daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand." The Father finds infinite delight in his well-beloved Son, and shall not we be directed by his wisdom to do the same? Since God accounts him elect and precious, we, too, will choose him, and reckon him to be most precious to our hearts.

Moreover, we prize our Lord Jesus as our foundation. Jehovah saith, "Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone." This foundation is not of our inventing, but of God's laying. What a privilege to have a foundation of the Lord's own laying! It is and must be the best, the surest, the most abiding, the most precious foundation. We value in a building a sound basis, and therefore we count our Lord most precious, because nothing that rests upon him can fail or fall.

Thus have I shown you that we run on good lines when Christ is precious to us. We are not here acting upon our own independent judgment, nor following a freak of fancy. If Christ be precious to us, we have God himself at the back of our judgment, and we are sure we do not err. Besides, we have this witness of the Spirit, that since we are pleased with Jesus, the Father is pleased with us. The Father is not only well pleased *with* Christ, but well pleased *in* Christ, and therefore he is well pleased with all who are in him. He is so sweet that he sweetens all who come to God by him. Precious Christ! Precious Christ!

II. Secondly, consider WHAT IT IS IN THE SAINTS WHICH MAKES THEM PRIZE CHRIST AT THIS RATE. It is their faith. "Unto you therefore *which believe* he is precious." To carnal sense and reason, Jesus is far from precious. To human wisdom Christ is not precious; see how men tug and labour to get rid of his Deity, and to trample on his precious blood. What laboured learning is brought forth to drain inspiration out of his book, and steal satisfaction out of his blood! but "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious." Faith calls him precious, when others esteem him "a root out of a dry ground."

Note well, that *to faith the promises concerning Christ are made.* If you will read Psalm cxviii., to which Peter refers, you will find that the Psalmist who rejoiced to see him made the headstone of the corner was a believer; for he says, "I will praise thee, for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation." The whole psalm runs in that way. As for the passage quoted from Isaiah xxviii. 16, it finishes thus, "He that believeth shall not make haste," or, "shall not be confounded." In both cases the preciousness of Christ is connected in the Scriptures with a believing people. The Bible never expects that without faith men will glorify Christ.

For, dear brethren, *it is by faith that the value of Christ is perceived.* You cannot see Christ by mere reason, for the natural man is blind to the things of the Spirit. You may study the evangelists themselves, but you will never get to see the real Christ, who is precious to believers, except by a personal act of faith in him. The Holy Spirit has removed the scales from the eyes of the man that believeth. If thou trustest the Saviour as a sinner must trust him, thou knowest more of him by that act of faith than all the schools could have taught thee. An ounce of faith is better than a ton of learning. Better be Christ's patient than a doctor of divinity: for his cure will teach thee more than all thy studies. More is to be learned in the closet by penitent faith than in the university by persevering research. If we look to him whom God has lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, we shall know more of him than if we closed our eyes and spent a century in meditation.

By faith, again, the Lord Jesus is appropriated. In possession lies much of preciousness. Is the Koh-i-Noor a precious thing to me? Well, it is precious in itself; but I cannot say that it is precious to me; for I do not even know where it is, nor do I give it more thought than if it were a bit of glass. When a thing belongs to you, it has a value to you, and you make a full estimate of it. Now, no man possesses Christ except he believes in him. O unbeliever, thou hast nothing to do with Jesus if thou wilt not trust in him! Though he be a priceless boon, he is nothing to thee if thou dost not rest in him! What hast thou to do to speak about him? Thou art without Christ if thou art without faith. Faith is the hand that grasps him, the mouth that feeds upon him, and therefore by faith he is precious.

By faith the Lord Jesus is more and more tasted and proved, and becomes more and more precious. In proportion as we test our Lord, he will rise in our esteem. If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, he is precious to you; but if so be you have more than tasted, and have gone on to feed upon him, you have found him to be marrow and

fatness to your soul, and he is more precious than ever to you. The more afflictions a believer endures, the more does he discover of the sustaining power of Christ, and therefore the more precious Christ becomes to him. You that have been caught in a storm at sea and have seen him come to you walking on the water, and have heard him rebuke the winds and the waves, you prize him beyond all price. In the great deeps of tribulation we find many a pearl of the knowledge of Christ. To us our Lord is as gold tried in the fire. Our knowledge is neither theoretical nor traditional; we have seen him ourselves, and he is precious to us.

Our sense of Christ's preciousness, as I have said before, is a proof of our possessing the faith of God's elect; and this ought to be a great comfort to any of you who are in the habit of looking within. If you enquire within yourselves, "Is my faith wrought in my soul by the Holy Spirit?" you may have a sure test. Does it magnify Christ? If it makes Christ inexpressibly dear to you, it is the faith of God's elect. May God grant you to have more of it!

Christ becomes growingly precious to us as our faith grows. If you have faith in Christ, but do not exercise it every day, he will not be very precious to you. But if your faith keeps her eye fixed on him, she will more and more clearly perceive his beauties. If your soul is driven to Jesus again and again, if your faith anchors in him continually, then he will be indeed more and more precious to you. Everything depends upon faith. If thou doubtest Christ, he has gone down fifty per cent. in thine esteem. Every doubt is a Christ crucifier. Every time you give way to scepticism and critical questioning you lose a sip of sweetness. The dog that barks loses the bone, and the Christian that disputes loses spiritual food. In proportion as you believe with a faith which is childlike, clear, simple, strong, unbroken, in that proportion will Christ be dearer and dearer to you. I recommend you to keep the door of your mind on the chain in these days; for those tramps and vagrants called doubts are prowling about in every quarter, and they may knock at your door with vile intent. The first thing they say, when they are at a good man's door, is, "I am an honest doubt." That which so loudly calls itself honest, has good need to fabricate for itself a character. The most honest doubt is a great thief; but the most of doubts are as dishonest as common housebreakers. Keep doubt out of the soul, or you will make small progress in the discovery of the preciousness of Christ. Never entertain a thought that is derogatory to Christ's person, or to his atoning sacrifice. Reckon that opinion to be your enemy which is the enemy of the cross of Christ. Do not suffer your faith to diminish even in the least degree. Believe in Christ heartily and unsuspectingly! If you have a doubt as to whether you are a saint, you can have no question that you are a sinner: come to Christ as a sinner, and put your trust in him as your Saviour. It is wonderful how a renewed confidence in Christ's saving grace will bring back all your joy and delight in him, and sometimes do it at once. "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." When I was dull and dead, on a sudden I touched his garment by faith, and my life was renewed in me, even to leaping and rejoicing. God grant you,

dear brethren, by faith to know the preciousness of Christ; for only to you that believe is he precious! To you that doubt, to you that mistrust, to you that suspect, to you that live in the land of hesitation, he is without form or comeliness; but to you that believe without stint, he is precious beyond all price.

III. Now I come to the last point. Briefly consider WHAT BELIEVERS RECEIVE FROM HIM. Take the exact translation—"Unto you that believe he is honour." Honour! Can honour ever belong to a sinner like me? Worthless, base, only fit to be cast away, can I have honour? Listen! "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." A woman had been a harlot, but she believed in Jesus, and she was so honourable that she was allowed to wash his feet with tears, and wipe them with the hairs of her head. Thus was she a handmaid in the courts of our God. A man had been a thief; but he believed while dying, and lo, he was the first person that Jesus received when he came into his kingdom—he was so honourable. The Lord changes the rank when he forgives the sin. Thou art dishonourable no longer if thou believest in Jesus. Thou art honourable before God now that he has become thy salvation. Yesterday thou didst feed the swine; to-day thou art joyfully welcomed to thy Father's house. Listen to that music and dancing, it is all for thee! See the fatted calf killed and roasting at the fire; it is for thee! For thee the shoes upon thy feet, and the ring that decks thy finger. Thy Father gives himself to thee by those fond kisses which he lavishes upon thee. Oh yes, Christ is honour to his people: his redemption makes that precious which seemed to have no value before.

Further, let me notice that *it is a high honour to be associated with the Lord Jesus.* When a valiant man has achieved a great victory everybody likes to claim some connection with him. The few persons still alive who were at the battle of Waterloo are proud of the fact. And no wonder! Though only a drummer boy at the time, the old man is proud to tell that he was there when his countrymen broke the tyrant's power. Men even carry to the extreme of folly any slight connection with the great, like the man who boasted that the king had spoken to him, when it turned out that all his majesty said was, "Get out of the way!" We have real honour in being associated with our Lord Christ in any capacity. It is an honour to have washed the feet of his servants, or to have given a cup of cold water to one of his disciples. Simple trust and grateful service make a link more precious than gold. Did men laugh at you for Christ's sake? That honours you with him. Did you suffer reproach for Christ's truth? It is well: thus are you bound up in the bundle of life with him whom you love. The day shall come when it shall be thought to be the highest honour that ever was to have been denounced as a bigot and cast out as a troubler, for the sake of Christ and his gospel. How pleased was John the Baptist to be connected with Jesus, though he said, "the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose"! How glad was Paul to be subservient to his Lord! He calls himself Christ's bond-servant. We read it "servant" in our softened version, but Paul was charmed to

feel that he had been bought with Christ's blood, and was therefore as much his property as a man thought a slave to be when he had paid his price. Oh, to be as the dust of our Lord's feet! Even this were honour! To be his menial servant is better than to rule all the Russias. Some of us bless the Lord that we are associated with his old-fashioned cross, his time-worn truth, his despised atonement, his antiquated Bible. I protest I bind this as a chaplet about my brow. Jesus, the Substitute, is my honour, and the doctrines of grace are my glory.

Again, *it is a great honour to be built on him as a sure foundation.* If you read the passage in Isaiah xxviii. you will see that those who made lies their refuge were trodden down, but not those who rested on the sure foundation; for of them it is written, "He that believeth shall not make haste." Because he had built upon Christ, the builder enjoyed an honourable rest. I do not know how I should feel if I had had to think out a way of salvation for myself: but I find it happy work to accept what God has clearly revealed in his Word. A minister once said to me, "It must be very easy for you to preach." I said, "Do you think so? I do not look at it as a light affair." "Yes," he said; "it is easy, because you hold a fixed and definite set of truths, upon which you dwell from year to year." I did not see how this made it easy to preach, but I did see how it made my heart easy, and I said, "Yes, that is true. I keep to one fixed line of truth." "That is not my case," said he; "I revise my creed from week to week. It is with me constant change and progress." I did not say much, but I thought the more. If the foundation is constantly being altered, the building will be rather shaky. Surely, if the basis be not settled, we shall, in our work, show a good deal of jerry-building! It is a precious thing to my heart to feel sure about the verities of God—the surely-revealed facts of Scripture. Having once made Christ my foundation, I shall take a leaf out of the book of the Puritans of Massachusetts. I have heard that in their early days their counsellors agreed "that the State of Massachusetts should be governed by the laws of God, till they had time to make better ones." So will I rest on Christ alone till I can find a better resting-place. When we find that God has laid another foundation, we will look at it. When we discover a foundation more suitable for sinners than the sinner's Saviour, we will consider it; but not till then.

Beloved, *it is an honour to believe the doctrines taught by Christ and his apostles.* It is an honour to be on the same lines of truth as the Holy Ghost. It is an honour to believe what the lips of Jesus taught. I had sooner be a fool with Christ than a wise man with the philosophers. The day shall come when he that cleaves most to the gospel of God shall be the most honoured man.

It is an honour to do as Christ bade us in his precepts. Holiness is the truest royalty. It is never a disgrace to any man to be baptized into his name, or to come to his table, and break bread in remembrance of him. The Virgin's advice is sound—"Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Obedience to Jesus is no discredit to any man. It is an honour to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." Take this as a sure word—sin is disgrace, but holiness is honour.

It will be our great honour to see our Lord glorified. That one hundred and eighteenth Psalm depicts the exultation of the saints in the day when Christ shall appear in his glory. See how it runs. "I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." It is a very jubilant psalm. All the adversaries of the believer have been destroyed like swarms of bees, and burned up like heaps of thorns; but the believer is safe; and more, he is glorified as he sees his despised and rejected Lord made head over all things to his church. What an honour to have been with him in his humiliation! How glorious to rehearse the story! The Lord laid Christ as the foundation though the heathen raged. The walls have risen despite the foe. The corner stone is in its place, though the builders refused it. Glory! Glory! He whom we love has come to his own, although the kings stood up and the rulers took counsel together against him. Now, it is no more "Crucify him! crucify him!" but "Crown him! Crown him!" Now he is no more the servant of servants, but King of kings and Lord of lords. Hallelujah! Like bursts of great artillery the praises of men and angels break forth again and again for him. Hallelujah! hallelujah! hallelujah! He must reign! he must reign! The Father wills it, and reign he shall, all enemies being put under his feet. In that day, to you that believe, he will be an honour. You shall be his honoured attendants when he mounts the throne. Surely, the angels will set great store by every one of you that believed in Christ in the day of his scorning: they will carry you as trophies through the golden streets. Here is a man that believed in Jesus when the world despised him. Though he was poor and obscure he dared to own his Lord and stand up for his truth. Happy man to have been able to give such a proof of loyalty! He was a common soldier in the barracks, and he was the butt of many a coarse joke; but he believed in Jesus! Honour to him! She was a humble workwoman, and all the girls in the warehouse ridiculed her for being a Christian. Honour to her! Honour to all who bore dishonour for Christ.

Before you go away I would beg you to consider how you stand in this matter. Do you believe in Jesus? If you do believe, be afraid of nothing. Come forward and confess that sacred name. Own that you are a follower of the Lamb; and then, in the day when he distributes crowns and thrones, he will have a crown and a throne for you. You at the resurrection shall wake up in him to glory and immortality.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Peter ii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—786, 817, 819.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SHANK-BONE SERMON; OR, TRUE BELIEVERS AND THEIR HELPERS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 13TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, March 23rd, 1890

"Who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace."—Acts xviii. 27.

APOLLOS is not Paul, and Paul is not Apollos. To blend the two in one would be to spoil each one of the two, without producing a good third. It is a great mercy that we have Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas, and other varieties of preachers; for not only is variety charming, but it is necessary. It is not everybody that can be profited by Paul; for it requires a great deal of fixed attention to follow him, and many hearers cannot concentrate their thoughts for long. It is not everybody that can be profited by Apollos, for fine speech is thrown away on simple souls. It is written, "Then shall the lambs feed after their manner"; and assuredly each one of them has a peculiar manner of feeding. Some of God's people are edified by one minister, and some by another: it is not mere whim, but it arises out of conformation of character, and habit of mind. Let Paul be Paul, and edify the Pauline class; and let Apollos be Apollos, and instruct those of his own sort. For my part, I would try to profit by either Paul, Apollos, Cephas, John, or James; but, alas! I do not know where to go to hear them. I am happy in hoping that their successors are still with us, each one with his peculiar style of things. I am not going to compare them with each other; but I would commend each one, and thank God, by whose grace he is what he is. It would be a very bad day's work, if we could do it, to reduce Paul to Apollos, or to bring Apollos to the style of Paul. In the body there are different members, and all members have not the same office; and in the church of God there are different ministries, and all ministries do not work after like manner, though they all work towards the selfsame end. If, my dear friend, God gives you grace to bring sinners to

Christ, and to plant churches, be thankful that you can imitate Paul; and if you cannot do that, but can help those who are already converted, be thankful for such a gift, and imitate Apollos. Let not the man who plants envy the man who waters; and let not the man who waters boast over the man who simply plants and goes his way; for Paul has his place, and is honoured of his Master as a planter; and Apollos has his place, and shall not lack his reward as a waterer.

You see that the Holy Spirit has been pleased, by the pen of Luke, to give to Paul's travels and labours a very large proportion of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles; this passage from the twenty-fourth to the twenty-eighth verse is an episode—a corner marked off to be a record of Apollos. What Apollos did afterwards we do not know. He may have been a very great evangelist; he certainly was an exceedingly useful brother. But, dear friends, I find no complaint from Apollos, because, being mentioned in the sacred despatches, he has so small a space allotted him. He does not sulk because he has only four or five verses, while Paul is described at great length. If you and I should work for Christ, and never be mentioned in the records of earth at all, let us not be sorry: *there is most peace to those who are least talked about*. God, who is a Sovereign, dispenses according to his will, and it may be that one working brother will have all his story told, and his life will make a useful biography, instructing and stimulating many for generations. Be it so. Another brother, equally earnest and fervent, may never have his life written: there may only remain in the traditions of the church one or two anecdotes about him, helpful and good; but let him not mind his obscurity, his real usefulness may be none the less. Our record is on high. If the chronicles of earth be faulty, the registers of heaven are perfect. Many a man who has been forgotten here shall be remembered there; and I wot that in heaven it will give no saint the least trouble that he was not honoured among men. What if no monument was set up, yet all true work is immortal. The diligent workman will be perfectly contented when his Master says to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The echo of those words shall be heaven to him. Sweeter than all the harps of angels shall be the voice of his Lord's approval. Go on, Apollos! Work on, though there be little said about you, and do not envy Paul, with whose name the halls of the church are ringing. He did not seek himself any more than you did, and his content in the published record lies only in the fact that it honours his Lord.

But now, to come close to the text, I want you to notice these words—"When he was come, he helped them much which had believed through grace." Apollos, following Paul at Corinth, did useful service by confirming those who had already believed in the Lord Jesus. Our first head is—*true believers have believed through grace;* secondly, *such believers need help;* and, thirdly, *it is a worthy work in which to engage*—to help those who have believed through grace. May the Holy Spirit use many of us in this hallowed service! May we ourselves be helped through grace at this time!

I. First, then, THOSE WHO HAVE TRULY BELIEVED HAVE BELIEVED THROUGH GRACE. I suppose Luke felt it necessary to insert those words, "through grace." Nobody in his day doubted the fact that salvation

is wrought in men by the grace of God; but the Holy Spirit foresaw that many, in after days, would conceal or obscure this truth, and therefore he moved the evangelist to notify it very plainly. We have it under hand and seal from the Holy Ghost that those who believed in the Lord Jesus believed through grace. Surely, grace is to the front in all good things. And here let me say, *it is grace that gives us the gospel which we believe.*

"Grace first contrived the way
To save rebellious man;
And all the steps that grace display
Which drew the wondrous plan."

It was grace that chose the people whom God would save, and gave them over to the Lord Jesus. It was grace that gave Jesus Christ to stand in their room, and place, and stead, and bear for them that which was due to the justice of God on account of their sin. It was grace which led the Saviour to undertake and carry through the work of substitution. Grace wrote the first letter of the gospel: grace will write the last letter of it. Salvation is all of grace from first to last. I would to God that all preachers and hearers knew the meaning of that word "grace," and did not confuse it and mix it up with human endeavours and creature merits; for, indeed, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." If it be of grace, it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; and if it be of works, it is not of grace, otherwise work is no more work. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Grace signifies free, undeserved favour; and as it comes from God to us, it is sovereign grace which is moved only by the good pleasure of Jehovah's will. Grace is the active movement of the divine will to produce the results which have been graciously determined on. Grace makes a distinction between man and man, and it must have all the glory of what it does. Grace is exercised according to the will of God, and not according to the will of man, for the Lord hath said it—"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Grace sat in the council chamber of eternity and devised the scheme of mercy, the plan of redemption, the method of peace through the blood, the whole dispensation of salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

I say, then, that while grace gives us the gospel to believe, *grace also gives us to believe the gospel.* We are personally to believe the gospel, and so only can we be saved. But if I came before you to-night, and had nothing further to say than "Believe the gospel, and you shall be saved," the message would add to your solemn responsibility, and yet it would not save you; for you would not believe, but would continue in your sins. Man left to himself is an unbeliever, and an unbeliever he will remain. To meet the deep depravity of our nature, and its settled unbelief, he who gave the gospel to be believed, also gives the faith that believes the gospel. This is a wonder of grace; but then in the realm of grace everything is wonderful. We are so set on mischief, so proud, so vain-glorious, so unbelieving, that we

never do come to receive the gospel, except through the operation of the grace of God upon our consciences and wills. The faith which comes to God first came from God. I remember, when I believed in Christ, and took him to be my trust, and was saved: I believed, and thus I entered into life and peace. It was not till some time after that I saw the reason why I had believed. I said to myself, "How is it that I have believed in Christ, while others who have attended the same gospel ministry, and have enjoyed the same advantages, have not believed in him?" The enquiry was not, "Why did *they* refuse to believe?" I saw at once that their unbelief was their own fault and folly, and that the blame must be laid at their door, for they wilfully refused the Saviour; but this was not the question: I was not judging *them*, but I was examining myself, and enquiring why I had believed in the Lord Jesus. I saw that if I had believed, it was not to be set down to my personal credit. I could not take to myself any honour because of it. My believing, when they did not believe, did not spring from any betterness of nature on my part. God forbid that I should dream such a thing! It did not spring from any natural excellence of my will. There was a submissive will in me; but a something from above made that will submissive, and that something lay at the back of everything. Then I understood that it was God's grace that had made me to differ; and I gave to God, there and then, the glory of my faith, and the credit of my choice of Christ. I have never met with any Christian man, whatever his doctrinal views, but he has been willing to give to God the glory of his conversion. He has ascribed it to the working of the Holy Spirit, and not to himself; and he has joined with me in praising God for it. Though the brother may cavil at the doctrine of distinguishing grace in the gross, yet, in his own case in particular, he has been willing to confess that not only did grace give him a gospel to believe, but grace gave him to believe the gospel. We come; but God draws. We come to God because he draws us. We came to believe in Christ because his Spirit enlightened and persuaded us, and brought us into the happy state of salvation by faith in Christ.

Furthermore, I wish to add that *such believing is a sure evidence of grace*. If thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ with all thine heart, thou hast the grace of God in thee. There is no surer proof of it than this. Where there is faith there is grace: the one is the inseparable fruit of the other. "He that believeth on him hath everlasting life." "He that believeth on him is not condemned." These are not sentences of mine. I am quoting Holy Scripture to you; and the Scripture cannot be broken. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." It is the believing that brings us into this condition of peace with God. I care not what works thou shalt bring me, be they never so many; if thou dost not bring with thee faith, which is the chief of all works, thou hast brought me nothing. If thou believest in Jesus Christ, whom God has sent, thou hast the one sure and certain evidence of grace. If thou believest in Christ alone, and art resting thy salvation upon his finished righteousness, thou hast the clearest evidence that the grace of God is in thy heart. Wilt thou not search and see whether thou hast real faith in the Lord Jesus? Make

sure work on this point. If thou believest not, thou art condemned already.

And what is more, if thou believest through grace, *that grace which made thee believe is the best guarantee that thou shalt keep on believing.* Faith which is born of self will die of self; but that which is the child of grace will live for ever. If thou hast begun to believe of thyself thou wilt leave off of thyself; but if God's grace began thy believing, God's grace will continue thy believing, and thou wilt abide in this faith wherein thou standest even to the end. This gives me great comfort whenever I think of it; for I desire certainty for days to come. If the faith whereby I have laid hold on Christ to be my Saviour be altogether wrought in me by the Holy Ghost, through grace, then I defy the devil to take away that which he never gave, or to crush that which Jehovah himself created in me. I defy my free-will to fling away what it never brought to me. What God has given, created, introduced, and established in the heart he will maintain there. "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up"; but what he hath planted none shall root up; for it is written, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

The men of Corinth to whom Apollos came had believed *through grace.* Beloved, there is a sweet ring about this description. They "had believed," and their faith secured their souls; but they "had believed through grace," and that secured their faith. "Through grace" is the hall-mark upon the precious metal of believing. There is no such thing as true believing where grace is not present. We believe: it is an act of our own mind. But we believe through grace: it is the result of God's grace working upon our mind. We both will and do, because God worketh in us to will and to do. We believe, because the Holy Spirit leads us to trust in the Lord Jesus. So much upon the first point. May grace work in us true believing! O my hearers, how I wish that you were all such believers!

II. Now for the second consideration. SUCH BELIEVERS NEED HELP. I know they do, because we are told in the text that Apollos "helped them much which had believed through grace"; and his work was not a superfluous one, or it would not have been mentioned here with commendation. In what respects do those who have grace need help? In what ways can true believers be helped?

Many believers need help in *further instruction.* Young Christians cannot be supposed to know much when they first come to Christ; but they come to be disciples, that is to say, learners. They know the three R's—Ruin, Redemption, and Regeneration; and that is by no means a small part of spiritual education. But they do not know even these elementary truths so fully as they might know them, and even about these things they will be the better for more teaching. Oftentimes they need somebody to open up passages of Scripture, to expound to them the analogy of faith, and to help them to compare spiritual things with spiritual. Beloved, you may be a great help to new converts if you will teach them "the way of God more perfectly." Oh, that ministries were more instructive! Alas, it seems often as if the preacher skimmed the surface, and did not care to

enter into the treasure-house of doctrine, and open up the deep things of God. If public ministry falls short, private Christians must try to make up for it. We want the people instructed, for ignorance is the mother of superstition and scepticism. The uninstructed are easily carried away with novelties and delusions. Those who are established in the faith, and know what they believe, generally stand fast. Had the teaching from the pulpit been more clear and decisive during the past twenty years we should not now be living in an age of uncertainty.

Many who have believed through grace also need help by way of *consolation*. You would be astonished if you knew the large number of believers in Christ who are tempted to doubt, despondency, and distress of mind. In the present congregation there are a number of persons depressed in spirit, who can hardly look up, who will judge, when I am speaking, that I am referring to them; and I must confess that I am thinking of them, and do very often think about them, and long to see them come forth from their present gloom. It is a great joy to me if I can help them at all by describing my own experience of down-casting and up-lifting. These bruised and broken ones need binding up. Brothers, if you are like Barnabas, "sons of consolation," be not slack in your blessed service! O ye spiritual men, trained in the school of sorrow, put forth your best endeavours to minister to minds diseased. Pour in the oil and wine of the gospel wherever there is a wound gaping and bleeding. A word fitly spoken, a promise seasonably quoted, may help much those who have believed through grace.

Apollos helped them much, also, by *defending them against opponents*. We find that "he mightily convinced the Jews"; and in doing this he screened believing Gentiles from many a rude assault. He disputed with all his might, and with great fervour of spirit, against those who tried to subvert the faith of the Christians. Nowadays the Christian had need go fully armoured, for arrows fly thick as sleet in a storm. Objections are always being raised; doubts are always being insinuated. It is hard for a man to keep his feet amidst the present torrents of unbelief that sweep down our streets. You that can stand fast should help those who cannot. Ye that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak in the matter of doubt. Give tremblers a word to confirm them in "the faith once delivered to the saints." Older Christians can do much in this direction by mentioning their own experience of the certainty of divine truth. Tell the young people how God has helped you in the day of trial. Tell them how he has answered your prayers. Tell them what joy and peace you have had in dark times by trusting in God. Tell them, I pray you, the way by which the Lord has led you; and when you do this they will not be so likely to be staggered and cast down by every caviller who may assault them. "He helped them much which had believed through grace." Elderly Christians can do very much of this by baffling the adversary with those blessed facts of their own lives, which even to sceptics are stubborn things.

And we can also help those who have believed through grace by *giving them a word of direction*. They frequently do not know what

to do. They come to the end of their wits and their knowledge; and then the Christian who, by reason of use, has had his senses exercised, may be of great service to the bewildered. We are commissioned by the Lord to be eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, and guides to wanderers. It is the lot of some of us to be employed by the King to conduct trains of pilgrims to the celestial city; and full often we have to put ourselves in front of the women and the children to fight with Giant Grim or Giant Despair. For their sakes we enter the lists with lions, dragons, and other monsters. The journey of the weaker ones to heaven is a personally-conducted tour, and the Lord of the way employs us to be their guardians. All that have spiritual strength should carry out the commission which is implied in the very possession of that strength. You should help the weak, and give a brotherly word of advice to the inexperienced. O beloved, do we lay ourselves out for this—those of us who have been long the people of God—as we ought to do? Do you not think that there is a tendency among many to despise the weak and leave them to themselves. How are they to grow wiser and more instructed if they have no better society than their own? Do I hear an older one say, "Oh, that young lad, what does he know? What can he do towards my edification?" This is a very selfish question; let it not be heard among you. "I never got much out of the church," said one to me; and he was somewhat surprised when I replied, "I never joined the church to get anything out of it." "What did you join it for?" "Why, to do all I could for all who are in it." This wretched self-seeking poisons everything it touches. A certain lady went out with a number of Christian friends, and being very easily displeased, she was soon complaining, and turning to a friend she asked him if he enjoyed himself. "No," said he, "I did not come here to enjoy *myself*, I came here to enjoy other people." There is a great deal in that. If you live for yourself, your object is mean and unsatisfactory. In fact if you live to yourself, you will die; but if you will learn to live to help the feeble, and guide the doubtful, and to be a Great-Heart for King Jesus, you will live abundantly, for God will bless you.

Dear friends, the bulk of Christians, when first converted, *need leaders*. They need somebody to show them the way, and to go before them; I would to God that many here present who have been taught of God, if they do not become preachers and ministers, may, nevertheless, by their conduct and conversation vie with Apollos in this blessed work of helping much those who have believed through grace. By word and by example may the Holy Spirit teach you how to be convoys to the little ships which are now making the voyage of life.

III. So I come to the third observation, which is this: IT IS A WORTHY WORK IN WHICH TO ENGAGE. Helping those who have believed through grace is a work worthy of the highest talent and the greatest experience. I want to impress upon many of my instructed brethren and sisters that they should engage in it at once, and keep at it continually. We are going to have a great number of converts in this place. We have been praying for them, and we are sure to have them, for the Lord hears prayer, and blesses his own truth. I want you to get ready to receive the new converts and nurse them for Christ.

Whenever children are expected, somebody is warned of it, and a skilled person is in readiness to cherish the weaklings. God will not send his babes to a church that is not prepared to nurse them; and I want to stir you up to be ready to help much those who shall believe through grace. I claim this assistance of you, and I feel sure that you will cheerfully render it, even as Apollos thus aided Paul.

First, *because you have been helped*, I claim it. Apollos became a helper because he had himself been helped. He began to preach, and he preached all that he knew; but his knowledge was very defective. What he said was good—very good; but it was not fully the gospel; for he had only learned of John the Baptist, and had not yet been taught the doctrine of Jesus. Apollos teaches very eloquently; but still there is a lack about his teaching. He has not yet reached the full chord; he does not sound out the blessed music of the gospel to perfection. Aquila and Priscilla ask him into their tent warehouse, and they say to him, "Dear friend, do you notice, you went just so far, but you should have gone a little farther. You spoke about the Lamb of God; but you did not tell them that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and that he had died to take away sin." Apollos replied, "I pray you, tell me all about it." And when they further informed him of the death, and the resurrection, and the ascension of the Lord Jesus, and of the coming of the Holy Ghost, Apollos said, "Thank you. Thank you. Now I have grand truths to preach, and my message will be more full and gracious than it has been. I shall go forth to the synagogue to-morrow to tell them about the Messiah who has truly come, and I shall speak with greater freedom concerning him." Apollos had been helped, and therefore Apollos was bound to help other people. Do you not think, you Christian people, that you owe something to the church of God as well as to the Christ of God? You were converted; was it not by a pastor's preaching, or by a teacher's instruction in the school, or by a book that had been written by a Christian man? Will you not repay the church of God that which you owe to her instrumentality? If you have been helped as well as converted, you are especially bound to lay yourself out to help others. When a person who has been very despondent, comes out into comfort, he should look out for desponding spirits, and use his own experience as a cordial to the fainting. I do not think that I ever feel so much at home in any work as when I am trying to encourage a heart which is on the verge of despair, for I have been in that plight myself. It is a high honour to nurse our Lord's wounded children. It is a great gift to have learned by experience how to sympathize. "Ah!" I say to them, "I have been where you are!" They look at me, and their eyes say, "No, surely, you never felt as we do." I therefore go further, and say, "If you feel worse than I did, I pity you indeed; for I could say with Job, 'My soul chooseth strangling rather than life.' I could readily enough have laid violent hands upon myself, to escape from my misery of spirit." In talking to those who are in that wretched condition, I find myself at home. He who has been in the dark dungeon knows the way to the bread and the water. If you have passed through depression of mind, and the Lord has appeared to your comfort, lay yourself out

to help others who are where you used to be. If you are in prison, and you get out, do not enjoy your own liberty alone, but hasten to set free another captive. Are your chains broken? Then be a chain-breaker in the Lord's name. A sailor, who had long been a prisoner in France, gained his liberty. He went into Seven Dials, bought a cage full of birds, and when he had paid for them, he opened the cage, and let them all fly. People cried with wonder, "What did you buy them for?" "Oh," he said, "I bought them to let them fly. I know what it is to be a prisoner myself, and I cannot bear that birds should be shut up in a cage." Go to those who are what you were—caged birds—and let them fly by telling them of Jesus, and the ransom price. Seek out poor, bound sinners, and proclaim freedom to them. Proclaim liberty at the market-cross in the name of Christ.

I speak to some here who have *a measure of natural ability for this work*. May be, you resemble Apollos, because Apollos was an eloquent man. "Ah!" says one, "I am not eloquent." I do not know that. There may be a difference of opinion as to what eloquence is. Eloquence is speaking out from the heart. I will tell you what I call eloquence in a child: it is the whole child working itself up to gain its wish and have its way. There is a pretty thing that the child wants. He is very little, but he tries to speak about it, and does his best to express his longings. He points to what he wants, and clutches at it, and cries after it. Still he does not succeed, and then he works himself up into an agony of desire. The boy cries all over—every bit of him pleads, demands, strives. Every hair of his head is pleading for what he wants. He not only cries with his eyes and with his tongue, but he cries with his fingers and his hair. He thinks of nothing but the one thing on which his little heart is set. I call that eloquence. There is, in the Vatican, the famous group of the Laocoon: I stood one day looking at it. You remember how the father and his sons are twisted about with venomous snakes, and they are writhing in agony as the deadly folds enclose them. As I stood looking at the priceless group, a gentleman said to me, "Mr. Spurgeon, look at that eloquent great-toe." Well, yes, I had looked at that great toe. It was like a live thing, though only marble. I had not called it "eloquent" till he gave me the word; but certainly it was eloquent, though silent. It spake of anguish and deadly pain. When a man speaks in earnest, he is eloquent even though he may be slow of speech. His whole nature is stirred as he pleads with sinners for the Lord Jesus; and this makes him eloquent. O my brothers, you know not what you can do till you get at it with your whole souls. But if you happen to have the gift of fluent speech, I pray you use it in helping those who have believed through grace. "I have not the gift of speech," says one. Well, dear brother, have you tried? have you tried? Many a man has great powers of speech, but he has been too bashful to develop them. Shall I put it in Saxon? He has been too much of a coward to find out his own capacity. If he could but have got rid of his fear under the impulse of a strong affection for others, he could have spoken; and, by degrees, he would have spoken well. We want more young men in this church to go forth and preach the gospel. What are you at, you dumb dogs? How will you answer

for it if your Lord is robbed through your sinful silence? All our organizations are in want of speaking men, and of earnest, loving, Christian women, who can plead with souls. I believe that there is much more of gift lying idle than we have ever suspected. I charge you, place your talent in the Lord's treasury at once, lest its rust should witness against you.

But if you have not a great measure of gift, never mind about that. I do not know but what Apollos did mischief through being too gifted, and too ready of speech. When he went to Corinth, he could speak better than Paul; and, after a while, he weaned the fickle ones from the apostle, to his grief. Apollos did not do this intentionally—it was not his fault; but some of them said, "Listen to Apollos! Is he not a splendid speaker? Did you ever hear such eloquence? Paul cannot talk in that way." One said, "I like Paul, for he is so deep; but yet he is neither a polished scholar, nor an elegant speaker like Apollos. He has never been to the college at Alexandria; he has never been polished by Egyptian philosophy. Apollos is the man for me." One cried, "I am of Paul"; and another, "I am of Apollos"; and another, "I am of Cephas"; while a few even said, "I am of Christ"—as if Christ could head a party within his own church. This led to a grievous dividing into parties and wretched following of men. When he saw it, Paul told them they were carnal, and mere babes in Christ. Talent and education may stand in the way of a believer, and may not help him. But in your infirmity there is no such danger, wherefore get to work despite your weakness. If you can only stutter, go and stutter the gospel; and it is the gospel that God will bless, not your stuttering nor your orating. If you can only write a letter in the simplest words about Jesus, go and do it; and the simplicity with which you write, while it looks like a weakness, may really be a source of strength, fitting it the better for God to use it.

If we have a measure of natural ability, be it great or small, let us use it; but if we have not that ability, we may *acquire one form of capacity in which Apollos abounded.* He was mighty in the Scriptures. Now, we can all study our Bibles. If we believe in Jesus in our hearts we ought to have the Bible at our fingers' ends; and, if so, we shall help many by our instructive talk. The good Bible student has lips like a springing well. When the word of God dwells in a man richly his speech drops fatness. Those who speak Scripture sow seed; and it is living and growing seed—seed whose harvest is salvation. It is God's Word, not our comment on God's Word, that saves men. Keep on quoting God's inspired truth, and be yourself inspired by it, so as to explain it by your own experience, and in that way you will help much them that have believed through grace.

But, dear friends, in addition to this, you will not do much unless you are like Apollos, *fervent in the spirit.* Notice that twenty-fifth verse —"fervent in the spirit." He was a burning man: a man on fire. He burned his way by his zeal. He was not content to speak calmly and coolly, but he threw his soul into his preaching. That is half the battle. I do not know whether it is not three-quarters of it. "Fervent in the spirit." If you are full of fire, and full of life, and full of heart,

you will be a blessing to others. "How can I get warmth of heart?" says one. Live in the presence of God. I cannot give you any other prescription. Let the Lord shine upon you as the Sun of Righteousness, and you will be fervent: all other methods are mere speculations, and will fail. The famous naturalist, Buffon, had once a large number of the wise men of the Academy of France in his grounds. They were all philosophers; and you know what a philosopher is. If you do not know, you should meet one; and I do not think that your appreciation of the sect will be increased. However, these were all philosophers, great men walking in a great man's gardens—all great together. In the grounds there was a glass globe, and when one of these profound philosophers touched this glass globe on the shady side, he found that it was very, very warm, while on the side that was exposed to the sun it was comparatively cool. Herein was a marvellous thing. He called his brother philosophers around him, and I picture them as they gave out their various theories why this glass globe was hotter on the side away from the sun than on the side which was bearing the full blaze of noonday. One had a theory of reflection, another of refraction, another of absorption: I cannot give you all their words, for they were wonderful words, and wonderful theories, and they discussed, and discussed, and discussed, till Buffon, not quite satisfied with the philosophical conclusions which they had reached, called the gardener, and said, "Gardener, can you tell me why this side of the globe, away from the sun, is hotter than the other side upon which the sun is shining?" "Yes, sir," said the gardener, "Just now I turned the globe round, because it was getting too hot on one side." This did not uphold the new philosophical theories, but it maintained an old-fashioned doctrine—namely, that the sun gives heat. You may depend upon it that the only answer to the question why a man is fervent in spirit is, that he keeps his heart near his Lord. You need not enter upon any philosophical disquisitions as to how to maintain fervour and enthusiasm, and all that. That is the most fervent heart which enjoys most of the light of God, and there is the end of the whole matter. If you live in the light of God's countenance, you will be fervent; and if you turn away from him you will grow cool. God give us to be fervent in spirit!

But now notice one thing more. Apollos greatly helped these people because *he preached Christ to them.* "For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ." If we are going to help those who have believed in Christ, our conversation with them must be full of Christ. Nothing will really feed the soul but Jesus. His flesh is meat indeed. His blood is drink indeed. All else is froth, or wind. Reading yesterday, in "Israel my Glory," a book by Mr. Wilkinson, who is the director of the Jewish mission at Mildmay, I saw a statement there which was quite new to me. He is speaking of the Jewish passover at the present day. Now, you know what the passover was according to the law of Moses—how a lamb was killed, and the blood was sprinkled on the lintel and the two side-posts, while the flesh was roasted and eaten. The Jews at this day observe the passover; but they observe it in a way which is according to the Rabbis, and not according to Moses. On the table

there are passover cakes, lettuce, chervil, and parsley, as the bitter herbs. This I understand, but what is this Charoseth—a mixture of lime and mortar? And whence come the egg and the salt water? Moses knows nothing of eggs and mortar. What is there, do you suppose, besides? "Oh," say you, "the Paschal Lamb." No, no; they have left that out. What is there at the Jewish passover at the present time instead of the lamb? A shank-bone! A shank-bone, mark you—with no meat upon it! Only a shank-bone! The blood is gone, and in place of it is an egg. The Lamb is gone, and instead thereof is a shank-bone. "Ah, me! How can they thus make void the law of God?" This I said involuntarily; but very soon I remembered that I could not blame the Jews, for they are only imitating the Christians. Go and hear many who pretend to preach the gospel. Where is the Lamb, the Sacrifice, to be fed upon? Where is the sprinkled blood? Why, they are ashamed to speak of "the blood." They think the very word is vulgar. But what do they give us? A bone! A bone! A bone that no dog would care for—a bone of modern thought put in the place of the Lamb, who ought to be fed upon by all the living Israel of God. I thank Mr. Wilkinson for such a simile. I smile to think of my Israelitish friends sitting down to the table with their shank-bone, and calling it the passover; but they are quite as near the mark as my Christian friends sitting down to their divinity, out of which the great doctrine of the atonement has been taken, and calling it the Christian faith. There is no food for bodies in the shank-bone, nor any food for souls in the modern theology; but in Christ crucified there is every help that a soul can want. Are you burdened with sin? He bore it on the tree. Are you afraid that sin will conquer you? You shall overcome by the blood of the Lamb. Trust in the atoning sacrifice alone and entirely, and you shall enter into a peace and joy which shall be the strength of your soul in future conflicts with evil.

I need not say more; but I would press upon my dear friends who know the Lord to go "help them much that have believed through grace." As for those who have not yet believed in Jesus, may they now come and trust him! The moment that you trust him you are saved. "Look unto me," saith he, "and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Look at once! Look and live!

"There is life in a look at the Crucified One."

The Lord, by his grace, constrain and enable you to give that look, and to him be glory for ever and ever! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts xviii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—414, 483, 781.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PRINCE OF LIFE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 20TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Morning, April 6th, 1890.

"And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses."—Acts iii. 15.

PETER does not conceal the death of Christ: he is not ashamed of the fact that his Lord was crucified. God forbid that any of us should be ashamed of the cross: may we speak of it without a blush! Peter does not flatter his hearers; but he declares that they "killed the Prince of life." This was literally true, and it was needful that they should know and feel it. There is no gospel without the cross, and no useful preaching which does not appeal to the conscience; yes, there must be the cross for doctrine, and honest rebuke as the trumpet to awaken men's hearts. Ye ministers, take note of this!

Mark well that, in the same sentence in which he testified to the Lord's death, Peter bears witness to his resurrection. The verse is very short, and yet contains the two greatest events of human history: "Ye killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead." The crucifixion and the resurrection come close together. There are no intervening words in Peter's speech, as there was scarcely an interval as a matter of fact. On the Friday evening our Redeemer is laid in the grave, and he quits it on the Sunday morning early. It is called "three days" by Oriental custom; but, as a matter of fact, the interval only consisted of parts of two days, and one whole day. God has a way of handling time which makes a day as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day; and in this case he compressed into the smallest space the three days during which the Great Hostage remained in durance vile in the grave. Beloved, I wish you would learn a lesson here: never draw out sorrow and dread beyond the shortest necessary period. You that have been made to feel your death, and are at this time, as it were, wrapped in your grave-clothes; I pray that you may know no long interval between the time when you are slain by the law and made alive again by grace! Why should we tarry longer than may be under the bondage of the law? Dark is that night in

which Jesus has not yet come, and yet the storm is raging. When the soul has only life enough to mourn its death it is a painful condition. Let that period be made as short as possible. Is it not written, "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight"? Why should we make months and years of that which need be scarcely three days? If God contracts three days into one, may we not by holy faith make short work of our time of conviction and fear? When we know our death, we have in measure begun to live, and we should be eager that our life should quit the sepulchre of doubt and enjoy the light of joy.

I am about to speak of our Lord for that very purpose. I hope that the music of his charming name may bring rejoicing to sad hearts. Here is your power to quit your spiritual death; here is your sole hope of spiritual life: Jesus who rose from the dead is "the Prince of life." We will begin with that. *Consider a title*—"Prince of life." When we have done with that, we will look further into our text, and *unfold a roll of wonder*—"Ye killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." There are many riddles in that paradoxical statement—"Ye killed the Prince of life." When we have done with these points, we will come to a speedy close, as we *suggest an inquiry* which may be practically profitable to you.

I. First, then, let us CONSIDER A TITLE—"The Prince of life." This is not a literal translation, though it is a valuable interpretation. The word here is that which is translated "author" in that place wherein our Lord is said to be "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. xii. 2); and yet again it is rendered "captain" (in Hebrews ii. 10), where he is called "the captain of our salvation," made perfect through suffering. The word "Prince" is not inaccurate, for the idea of princedom lies on the surface of the Greek word, and therefore I shall keep to our own thrice precious version, which, take it for all in all, remains the Queen of all the versions. Still, you will not forget that it does include the sense of "*author of life.*" Here it may be well to say that we think that Christ is indeed the Creator of all things, and especially of life: "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life." Our Lord Jesus is peculiarly the Creator in connection with life; and I take pleasure in thinking of all life as proceeding from him by whom all things consist. But this is assuredly true of all spiritual life, which is a higher and a nobler thing than life vegetable, animal, or mental. From him, the Sun of Righteousness, every vital spark of heavenly flame has been sent forth: he is the quickening Spirit, and by union with him we live unto God, if, indeed, we so live. There is no spiritual life of which he is not the author, and there never will be. When you and I come to deal with men for their salvation, we discover our inability; for we perceive that the creation of life is out of our power, since it remains the sole prerogative of the Son of God. To him is given power over all flesh, that he may give eternal life to as many as the Father has given him. "As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." All our preaching is in vain unless Jesus send forth life. "He that hath the Son hath life; and

he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John v. 12); and what can we do among the dead? Come, thou Lord and Giver of life; for without thee we are but as the dead burying the dead.

But now we will handle our text as it stands in our version. It is a beautiful name this—"the Prince of life." Though seldom preached upon, it is one of our Lord's famous titles. He will be gloriously known by this name in the day of his appearing, when he shall raise the dead; but it is a title which belonged to him before he was nailed to the tree; for they "killed the Prince of life." The title belonged to him even when he was dead; for when killed he was still "the Prince of life." The title is his to the full now that he is risen, and ever lives to make intercession for us. None can share it with him, much less can any take it away from him. He alone is "the Prince of life."

Upon this famous title we would remark that it is justified by the fact that *he possesses life supremely*. In him is life emphatically, to its deepest and highest degree. In him is life superlatively, and beyond all others. Of him John well said, "The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." He bears the name of "The Life" in that famous passage, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He says of himself, "I am he that liveth." As surely as we have a living God we have a living Saviour. He is life self-existent, sustained by nothing from without. He is life essential, life eternal. He is the Prince of life, because in him life dwells in all its fulness, force, and independence. "As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John v. 26). Jesus lives: he must live: he cannot cease to live. All things else may pass away, and like the bubbles on the wave dissolve into their native nothingness; but the Christ of God must live, and live in full energy, and hence he is "the Prince of life."

Life is his natural patrimony. Life is his royal heritage. We hear of ladies who are peeresses in their own right; so is Christ the Prince of life in his own right; not only by purchase, or attainment, or reward, but by his nature and relationship to the Highest; for he is in himself God that liveth for ever. Moreover, he has power over his own life, in a way in which none of us can imitate him: as the God-man his life is absolutely at his own disposal. In the realm of life he is Prince, but we are only subjects. He says of his own life, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again;" this is not our case. We pay the debt of nature, and die; but our Lord owed no debt to nature, seeing he is the Maker of all. He died voluntarily, and of his own accord; you and I may not do this except under the compulsion of obedience to God. He resumed possession of life at his own will, which you and I could not do. He had the right, the authority, the power thus to deal with his own life. If this had not been so, he could not have offered himself to die in our place and stead; but, having a power and princedom over his own life, such as we have not, he could lay down his life for us, and he could take it again. O man! thou hast not life in thine own right: it is lent to thee by him who is still owner of it. Thou

canst not lay down thy life at will; for it is not thine, but God's. Live thine appointed time, else wilt thou commit a crime against the majesty of the Life-giver! Our Lord Jesus assumed the life of men, and when he chose he could lay it down; for he was still the ever-living God. When he chose he could raise his human body from among the dead, and walk again among the sons of men: this he hath done, and many witnesses have attested the fact. Let us rejoice that we worship the living God through a living Mediator! How glad are we that we are comforted by the same assurance which sustained the heart of Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth"! In an hour of great depression of spirit Luther was seen to write on the table before him these two words—*Vivit! Vivit!* and when he had so written, he arose, and went about his business calmly and quietly, as well he might, since his Almighty Helper lived. "The Lord is risen indeed." Is not this enough to make us all Luthers if we could but drink it in? For if Jehovah Jesus lives, his cause can never die; and our acceptance before God can never fail. The great Redeemer lives emphatically and eternally, and therefore let our faith in him rise to full assurance, and let that full assurance lift us to the summit of delight.

"He lives, he lives, and sits above,
For ever interceding there;
Who shall divide us from his love?
Or what shall tempt us to despair?"

In the next place, consider that our Lord is "the Prince of life" because *he won it for us right gloriously*. We had forfeited life, and had come under the sentence, "Thou shalt surely die." We fell under bondage to the power of death, and became dead to God, and righteousness, and hope. Our Lord Jesus entered into the lists against our great adversary, who had the power of death, that is, the devil. He had skirmishes with him in the wilderness, and he struggled with him in the garden, even to a bloody sweat. Our enemy was strong through our sin and the curse of the law which follows it; but our Lord was strong in love to bear our sin in his own body, and to endure the chastisement of our peace upon the cross. He fought the foes of our souls, and returned with dyed garments from Edom, having trampled under his lone foot all the powers of darkness, as the grapes are trodden in the winepress. He himself bowed his head to death, and by death he overcame the prince of darkness. By his patient suffering and painful death he won for us the right to live for ever. His endurance of the death-penalty blotted out the writ of judgment which had been issued against us: he himself putting it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

"Bruisèd is the serpent's head,
Hell is vanquish'd, death is dead,
And to Christ gone up on high,
Captive is captivity."

By dying, the just for the unjust, our Lord, who was both Victim and Victor became our "Prince of life," handing us the pardon and justification, by which our eternal life is secured. As by the first Adam came death, so by the second Adam life has been bestowed. "There

is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," for the condemnation has been passed upon him; and by this grand transference, while death has passed upon him, life has come to us. Our life is the glorious spoil which "the Prince of life" has snatched from the Destroyer, and granted freely to us. Well may we crown him Prince of life "who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"!

Thirdly, our Lord may well be called "the Prince of life," because *he gives it so plentifully*. With both hands he scatters it where else all had been death. As he hath life most abundantly, and has won for us the right to it, so he actually imparts it to his chosen by the Spirit of life. Where the Tartar's horse trod, the grass never grew; but where Christ's feet tread, life springs up in the midst of the arid wilderness. He cannot live without scattering life all around him, even as the sun cannot exist without giving out his light on all sides. None but he can give life to men; but he can give it without measure. To those furthest sunken in death, even to the corrupt in heart, who stink in the nostrils of their fellow-men, he can give life. His voice can be heard in the innermost prison of spiritual death. As he called Lazarus, and made him live by his own supreme power, so can he quicken the corrupt sinner to sweetness and heavenliness of life. None have yet been met with so far gone in corruption as to be beyond his quickening energy. None have ever trusted him without receiving life, though their case seemed desperate. Yea, the feeblest trust in him is life. They live that believe

"There is life in a look at the Crucified One."

On all sides he dispenses that everlasting life which he compares to water springing up within a well. They that come under his benign influence live for ever, because of their contact with him; for this is life eternal, to know the Lord Jesus, as sent of God. Beloved, the day will come when our Lord will prove his life-giving power on a grand scale by causing the resurrection of the dead. When he shall come in the glory of the Father, they that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. What an Exodus will it be! The slaves of death shall quit the Egypt of the sepulchre, and march forth from the house of bondage. Land and sea shall teem with the uncountable multitude, and he that called them forth shall be seen to be "the Prince of life." Who but he could have released this vast multitude from their long prison? The Roman Emperor Theodosius, in a fit of great good humour, set at liberty all persons in prison, or in captivity; and then he sighed, and wished that he could release the dead from their graves. Theodosius could not reach the keys of the grave; these hang at the girdle of "the Prince of life." He shall open the iron gate, and bid the myriads pour forth, as bees from the hive. They sleep together in the dust, but when he calls they shall answer him. Hear this, O mourner: "Thy brother shall rise again!" Every man's brother shall rise again; an exceeding great army shall be seen where now we mourn a valley of dry bones. Until that glorious morning, nothing pleases our Lord better than to be working spiritual resurrections. He saith,

"He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" Do you know anything about being quickened from the death wherein you lay dead in trespasses and in sins? Remember that marvellous sentence—"I am the resurrection and the life." Your Lord himself is the resurrection; do you know this? Those who have him have life eternal. Have you proved this truth? God grant that we may have many exemplifications of that fact in this house at this moment! May many of you look to Jesus, and begin the life which never ends!

Next, I think we may fitly style our Lord "Prince of life," because *he so wondrously sustains it.* If thou hast life, yet dost thou need food. Thou knowest where to find food for thy body; the fields and the floods yield it to thee; but where wilt thou find food for thy soul? There is but one place to which thou canst resort. Apart from Christ Jesus, not even heaven itself can yield it to thee, though it drop with manna; "for your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead." Heaven itself can only give us the nutriment of spiritual life in that one form, namely, Christ Jesus. He says, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." He says again, "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." Brother, do you know this bread from heaven by handling and tasting it? If so, renew your acquaintance with it by receiving it anew. O soul, there is supreme virtue in this food which Jesus gives thee! Art thou faint this morning? Resort again to him who first gave thee life. Dost thou hunger? Come thou to him who is that Word of God by whom men live. He shall satisfy thy mouth with good things, and renew thy youth like the eagle's. He doth not bid thee take life from him, and then go elsewhere for bread wherewith to nourish it; no, he causes thee to live by thy constant and never-ending union with him, even as the branch lives in the vine. Pray, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." If thou feedest upon him whom God hath set forth to be the bread that never perishes, thou also shalt never perish, but live for ever. Oh, for a banquet upon this heavenly bread this morning! "Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Then, rising from the table well satisfied, you shall each one say, "Verily, he is the Prince of life, for we live by him."

Brethren, this name may be illustrated yet further by the fact that *he rules life most lovingly.* "The Prince of life" is not a mere title. I suppose the Prince of Wales does not govern Wales, as a matter of fact; and other princes who derive their names from different places do not necessarily rule over those places, but merely wear a title which means little or nothing. Our Lord Jesus wears no empty title, he is really Prince and Lord wherever he is Quickener. There is no spiritual life in the world which does not yield obedience to Jesus.

Other life may be rebellious, struggling against his sway; for "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, saying, Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us"; but the spiritually living, quickened by faith in him, cry each one to him, at the very first moment of their life, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" The spirit of life in Christ Jesus is the spirit of obedience. The life that Jesus gives does not go off at a tangent from him: it remains circulating about him as the planet around the sun. The life that Jesus gives is like the life of a body which is obedient to the head. My head says, "Lift your hand." Up goes the hand. "Close the fingers": they close. "Open the hand": it opens at once, without so much as a wish to rebel. The rule is where the life is, namely, in the head. Such is Christ to all truly living men and women: their life, their rule is in Christ Jesus. Where Jesus lives he reigns. I know there is in us another law working against the law of our mind, and sometimes bringing us into captivity to the law of sin and death; but this appertains not to our new-born life, it is a relic of our death. Sin comes of that "body of this death" over which we groan so deeply, crying, "Who shall deliver me?" As for the life which comes to us through our Lord Jesus, it is pure and heavenly. That which is born of God sinneth not; it followeth after righteousness, and keeps the way of holiness, and must do so eternally. The Prince of life is a real ruler, and the life he has created is subservient to his sway. He is head over all things *in* his church as well as *to* his church. Ruling with a mysterious, omnipotent, and effective power he worketh in the spiritual, so that they gladly pay their heart's homage to him.

I must give you observation the sixth, for I cannot else bring out all my thoughts on this marvellous name, "the Prince of life." Our Lord is *he who is the crown and glory of our life.* The prince, as the representative of the country, stands for it in the place of dignity and honour. At great ceremonials a country is represented and honoured by the presence of its crown prince. Among men it is but nominally that the prince is the glory of the nation; but in the divine life, Christ is indeed the flower, and crown, and glory of the people who are in him, even all the living in Zion. If you want to see the spiritual life, you may see it in any one of the members of the mystical body; but not to perfection. There is life in the hand, there is life in the foot, there is life even in our uncomely parts; but if you want to see the life of a man, you naturally look in his face. If you would see eternal life, behold it in the face of Jesus; for in him dwelleth eternal life to the full. He is the embodied, incarnate life of God for men, and in him is that life made perfect. Beloved, the glory of our manhood, as it is spiritually renewed and quickened, is Christ! He it is that hath raised our nature to the right hand of God. It is something to be a man, now that the Son of God is also man. It is much to be alive unto God, now that our life is hid with Christ in God. What a noble second Adam we have! How glorious he makes our nature! He is the flower of our manhood. All else is the branch, and leaf, and bud; but the supreme beauty, the image of God in man, finds full expression in the Firstborn from the dead, the altogether-lovely One.

He is the glory of our life, and hence he is well called "the Prince of life."

And, seventhly, which must bring this discussion of the title to a close—*it is he who himself is glorified by spiritual life.* Princes and kings reckon that the prosperity of their country reflects honour upon *them.* That monarch is great because he rules a great country: this king is famous because his armies have made him so. The people make the king. In our Lord's case, his living ones are his joy and crown. From him, and through him, and therefore *to* him, are all things in the realm of spiritual life. All spiritual life glorifies the living Christ. There is not a beat of the spiritual heart, there is not a breath of the spiritual lung, but what means love and loyalty to the Christ of God. That we should repent, that we should believe, that we should do good works—all this is to make Jesus a glorious prince, glorified by such holy and heavenly life. Your highest ambition, ye quickened ones, is that you may crown him Lord of all. If you had a wish and could now obtain your highest desire, your wish would be that he might be extolled, and be very high. I am sure it is so with you. You would forego at once ten thousand desires that lurk within your spirit, and that might, in themselves, be lawful enough; you would, I say, forego them all without regret, if *he* might have a glorious high throne, and be great unto the ends of the earth. I am sure it is so among the glorified in the New Jerusalem. In heaven they rejoice, but they joy before their Lord; in heaven they worship, but they worship the Lamb; in heaven they sing, but the song is, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." As in the aloe, all those long years of green leafage are tending to the production of one glorious flower in the end; as at last a flower-stalk shoots upward like a tree, and then is hung about with abundant flowering, so that the whole plant spends itself upon its blossoms, living only till they are displayed, so is it with the life of the saints of God. The aloe has no other reason for its growing than to bear that towering glory in the end; so is it with the entire mass of spiritual life which God has made—it is growing and gathering up all its strength throughout these ages, that Christ may be glorified. In the ages to come, Christ is to be manifested to principalities and powers in the heavenlies, in and through his church. We who live spiritually, make up his body; and as all the body ministers to the head, so do we all strive to bring honour and dominion to our Lord Jesus. It pleases the Holy Ghost in us to reveal Christ and magnify his name. Are we not, all of us, if children of God, yet all of us so many younger sons increasing the honour of the "Firstborn among many brethren?" All spiritual life is for him who is our life. "He shall live, and daily shall he be praised": we live alone for this. Bring forth your trophies to him, ye conquerors of sin! Pour out your treasures at his feet, ye who are rich toward God! Crown him King of kings, and Lord of lords. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! All spiritual life that was, and is, and ever shall be, is to the glory of him who saith, "I am he that liveth, and was dead, and am alive for evermore; and have the keys of hell and of death."

It is clear that he is well named "the Prince of life." I have

been doing my work very badly because it is beyond me. My subject masters me. I am reminded of a story about Mr. Moody. Mr. Moody finished his sermon, and as he walked away dissatisfied with himself, he said to a good Scotchman with whom he was staying, "I cannot get to the end of it." "Man," said the other, "did you think you ever could?" Who can compass the infinite? I did not imagine that I could reach the height of this great argument; but still, I hoped to do better than this. The Lord forgive my feebleness, and yet use it to his glory. I am not astonished at my failure, but I am weary of the ignorance which makes me fail. I wish I could glorify my Lord more. Help to make up for my deficiencies. Let this precious name lie like a sweet wafer on your tongue. Go to sleep to-night with it in your mouth, and may it flavour your very dreams, and may you wake up in the morning and find yourselves still with him who is "the Prince of life"!

II. Now, secondly, I have to UNFOLD A ROLL OF WONDERS, which I see in my text: "Ye killed the Prince of life."

See here, beloved, in the murder of Christ, *the height and infamy of human sin.* They chose a murderer, but they killed "the Prince of life." He lived for their sakes, but they slew him: he would die that men might live, but they killed him. You blame the Jews: nay, rather blame yourselves. Those who did this deed were representatives of the whole race. We, also, put the Lord to death. Our hands were crimsoned in his blood.

> "'Twas you my sins, my cruel sins,
> His chief tormentors were;
> Each of my crimes became a nail,
> And unbelief the spear."

Sin is Christicide. I have in my reading, in old books, found holy men speaking of sins as "accursed kill-Christs." The name was well deserved. When sin was full-blown, it brought forth Christ-murder as its chief product. Hear how the wicked husbandmen cry: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." He had nothing to do with our death but to bear the penalty of it, and he came hither only to make us live; but we with wicked hands have crucified him. What an evil and a bitter thing is sin! What a malicious and bloodthirsty monster! Oh, for grace to escape from it! A sevenfold depth of cursing lies within the heart of man; for he would kill his God, his Saviour. You, my hearer, will either be guilty of the death of Christ, or you will live by it. Which shall it be? You either kill *him*, or you live by him.

Another wonder is *our Lord's condescension.* How could he stoop to die? To die by the hands of wicked men? Behold the condescension of Christ, that being the Prince of life he should deign to die. A look of his would have made his murderers melt away, as it shall one day make heaven and earth to flee from his face. One word from him, and where would Caiaphas, and Annas, and Pilate, and the Roman soldiery have been? They would have become as the fat of rams, which speedily is consumed in smoke, had he but willed it; for by his will the old creation shall be dissolved. When he hung on the cross

the nails could not have kept him there of themselves. He could have stepped from the tree among his adversaries, and made them scatter like sheep when a wolf leaps into the flock. He died; but that loud cry of, "It is finished"! proved that his strength was in him, and that he died not of necessity. He could have lived; but for our sakes he submitted to death. How was it that there was a possibility for the Prince of life to die? I cannot enter into that mystery; but it was so. Though he was Lord of life, he could die, and he could yet continue to have such power that soon his spirit would return to his body, which remained dead in the tomb, but could not see corruption.

As I unroll my text I see another wonder, and that is, *the folly of rebellion against Christ.* They killed the Prince of life! What was the effect of this vain malice? Could they really kill the Prince of life? Go and extinguish the sun; go stop the heart of this great earth, so that there shall be no more pulsings in her tides; but you can never in very deed destroy "him who only hath immortality." Yet, they thought they had killed the Prince of life; and, in a sense, they had done so. And this is the idle dream of men to this day: they hope to quench the gospel, to silence the doctrines of grace, to exterminate the ancient orthodoxy, and to put modern heresies in its place. Vanity of vanities! Even as the resurrection mocked the guards, the watch, the stone, so shall the revival of true godliness and the restoration of true doctrine baffle the devices of men. They that count the towers, to pull them down, and go about Zion in the hope of destroying her bulwarks, shall yet know that the virgin daughter of Zion hath shaken her head at them, and laughed them to scorn. As the Lord Jesus liveth, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" shall remain eternally the same. Ye fools, when will ye be wise, and quit your vain rebellions?

The text also exhibits *the triumph of his life.* "The Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead." His Godhead raised him, his Father raised him, his Spirit raised him. He resumed his life, and thus was declared to be the Son of God with power. This glorious resurrection of Christ should cause the universe to sing. Rejoice; for Jesus hath left the dead, no more to die. A dead Christ? Then, there would have been a dead gospel! What had we to preach to you if Jesus had not risen? Now that he hath risen again we have justification to proclaim. Go, tell it all the world over: "The Lord hath risen indeed; the Lord hath risen indeed." His resurrection is the corner-stone of the good news which the Lord hath sent to believing men. Wherefore, with such a truth to publish, we faint not. This moved the apostles to preach with such boldness, because they knew that he whom they preached lived again.

Notice here in the text *the assurance of that fact*—"Whereof we are witnesses." There stood Peter and John, two evidently honest men; everything about them was straightforward; they had nothing to conceal, and nothing to gain by their testimony. They could have called upon all the twelve, and even upon above four hundred brethren, who at once had seen the risen Lord. The witness is perfect and unquestionable. Jesus assuredly overcame the pains of death, his soul was not left among the dead. His victory is proven. "Oh," say you, "those witnesses died nearly nineteen hundred years ago." Yes, yes; but a

testimony does not lose certainty by the lapse of years. If what they witnessed was true when they witnessed it, it is true now. They saw the Lord Jesus alive after his resurrection, and that settles the question. If hundreds of persons saw the Lord Jesus after he was risen, then he did certainly rise. Hallelujah! Here is a stone to build upon which the Goths and Vandals of modern doubt cannot tear from its place. The resurrection is as certain as any fact recorded in history. Jesus of Nazareth, though he was killed, did rise from the dead, and we rejoice therein.

Let us put the resurrection of Christ to its proper uses. Let us believe in him as "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Let us feel that our justification is certified by his resurrection, and our own resurrection is guaranteed by the self-same fact. We are safe in the hands of his living wisdom, his living power, his living love. Above all, let us look for our Lord's second coming; for he lives, and cannot for ever stay away from his people. He that brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the everlasting covenant will also cause him to appear as the chief Shepherd in the latter days. The heavens have received him for a while, but he must come to gather in his people and cause them to reign with him. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

III. I have done when I have taken time to SUGGEST AN ENQUIRY. Let each hearer say, "What has the Prince of life to do with me?" Beloved, do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? Is he alive to you, and do you live by him; or are you dead in sin? Which is it? A man must be either dead or alive. There is no space between death and life. You are either dead in sin or alive unto righteousness; which are you? Everyone may tell, if he will make searching enquiry into his own state. A brother said to me this morning, "When you preach I generally find I have enough to do to mind my own business." May you all find it so! Mind your own business, and enquire, "Have I received divine life from Christ?" I will suppose the answer comes from one, "No, I am afraid I have not received it." Well, then, do you wish for it? Is there in your heart a desire to possess this new life? "The Prince of life" is to be found if you seek him. Scripture gives us this as one of the rules of the kingdom, "He that seeketh findeth." But mind that you make a thorough and sincere search. A farmer, by some means, lost a five-pound-note in his barn. It was of great importance to him that he should find it, for it was the most of what he possessed. So he said to himself, "I am certain that I lost this note in the barn; and as I must find it, I will turn over every straw in the barn rather than lose it. I will never leave off looking for it till I find it." After some days' search, as "for a needle in a bottle of hay," he spied out his precious bank-note among the straw, and came home greatly rejoicing. Sometime afterward, it pleased God to visit him with a deep sense of sin, and he said to his wife, "I wish I could believe in the Saviour; but, alas! I cannot find him." She wisely replied, "If you will look for him as you looked for that bank-note in the barn, you will find him." "Well," said he, "that is what I will do"; and by grace his seeking of Jesus led to finding,

and he was saved, and knew it. O brothers, turn over those trusses of memories of the Word which you heard long ago, and among them you may find the Saviour. O sisters, stir up the dust of what you learned in the Sunday-school, and you shall come upon your Lord before long. It is written, "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

If Christ were dead and motionless, he would be hard to discover; but life cannot long be hidden. On the hillside yonder soldiers are waiting to come down upon our army, but our watchers cannot see them, because the men lie quiet behind rocks and trees. The moment the soldiers begin to move we shall discern them: a living and moving object our glasses will soon detect. O souls, the Lord Jesus is living and moving, and therefore he is visible to the naked eye of faith! Look *for* him, and then look *to* him. Because he is life, he cannot be hid. Oh, that you may behold him soon! "Oh," says one, "I do long to find eternal life!" Then, seek it in the right way. Follow only one track: Jesus is the one and only way to life. In the old times of slavery in the States, when men escaped from their masters, they did so by knowing that the north star would lead them to freedom, and by following that heavenly guide. They had to travel by night, for fear of being captured and taken back; and therefore they learned little of the geography of the country: they cared for nothing but the star. As they hastened through the woods, they did not study botany; as they flitted through towns and villages along the road, they learned nothing of politics or social reform: they knew one thing, and minded that one thing only: they kept on following the pole-star. Brother, there are hosts of things that you do not know at present, and many things that you will never know; but see that you know Jesus, who is the pole-star of salvation. Keep Christ in your eye. Follow the crucified and risen One. Trust him, rely upon him, follow him, receive the life of which he is the Prince, and it shall be well with your soul. May you live in Christ Jesus, and glorify him as "the Prince of life" for ever and ever! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts iii.; iv. 1—14.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—306, 430, 313.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A HOMILY FOR HUMBLE FOLKS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 27TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Morning, April 13th, 1890.

"Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man."—Proverbs xxx. 2.

SOMETIMES it is necessary for a speaker to refer to himself, and he may feel it needful to do so in a way peculiar to the occasion. When Elihu addressed himself to Job and the three wise men, he commended himself to them, saying, "I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me"; but when Agur instructed his two disciples, Ithiel and Ucal, he spoke in the lowliest terms of himself, and declared that he was "more brutish than any man." Wisdom is justified of her children. Neither of these men was to blame for his opening words to his hearers. Elihu was a young man talking to elderly men of great note for learning: he saw that they had blundered terribly; he felt convinced that he had the right view of the matter under discussion, but he thought it discreet to introduce himself by modestly stating the reasons why he thought he should be patiently heard. Agur was probably a man of years and honour, and possibly his two young friends looked up to him more than was meet, and therefore his principal endeavour was to wean them from undue confidence in himself. He passed the gravest censure upon himself, that his hearers might not suffer their faith to stand in the wisdom of men. I can suppose that both Elihu and Agur were equally humble—the one so modest that he felt that he needed to commend himself to gain a hearing; and the other so lowly that he feared the hearing he should win would place his personal influence in too high a place.

But did Agur really mean all he said? I cannot doubt it. Forcible expressions are not always to be understood in their strictest sense; yet I have no doubt Agur meant to describe himself as he felt himself to be, apart from the grace of God. Or better, and more likely, he felt thus brutish and foolish after he had been enlightened by the Spirit of God. One mark of a man's true wisdom is his knowledge of his ignorance. Have you never noticed how the clean heart

always mourns its uncleanness, and the wise man always laments his folly? It needs holiness to detect our own unholiness, and it needs wisdom to discover our own folly. When a man talks of his own cleanness, his very lips are foul with pride; and when a man boasts of his wisdom, he proclaims his folly with trumpet sound. Because God had taught Agur much, he felt that he knew but little.

Especially I think the truth of our text relates to one particular line of things. This man was a naturalist. We have nothing of his save this chapter, but his allusions to natural history all through it are exceedingly abundant. He was an instructed scientist; but he felt that he could not by searching find out God, nor fashion an idea of him from his own thoughts. When he heard of the great discoveries of those who judged themselves to be superior persons, he disowned such wisdom as theirs. Other men with their great understanding might be fishing up pearls of truth from the sea; as for himself, he knew nothing but that which he found in God's Word. He had none of that boasted understanding which climbed the heavens, bound the winds, and swathed the sea, and so found out the sacred name; he was content with revelation, and felt that "every word of God is pure." Not in any earthly school learned he the knowledge of the Holy: all that he knew he had been taught by God's Book. He had in thought climbed to heaven and come down again: he had listened to the speech of winds, and waves, and mountains; but he protested that in all this he had not discovered God's name nor his Son's name by his own understanding. All his light had come through the Lord's own Word; and he shrewdly gave this caution to those who thought themselves supremely wise, above what is written: "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Philosophy had failed him, and revelation was his sole confidence. As for himself, he did not claim that degree of perception and profundity which enabled him to think out God; but he went to God himself and learned from him at first hand, through his revealed wisdom. This I take to be his meaning; but I shall not use the text in that way this morning.

Here was a man, who, whatever he really was, held himself in his own opinion and judgment to be an inferior person; and yet, nevertheless, was *a firm believer* in his God. He was not only a firm believer, but he was *an earnest student* of the sacred oracles. All the more because of his ignorance, he pressed on to learn more and more of God. Nor was this all, he was *a willing worker;* for he spoke prophetically in the name of the Lord. Nor do we even end here; for from this short writing, it is clear that he was *a joyful truster in God.* Brutish as he judged himself to be, he rose into supreme content at every thought of God. Those four points I am going to handle at this time, as the Lord may help me by his Holy Spirit.

I. The first is this—A SENSE OF INFERIORITY MUST NOT KEEP US BACK FROM FAITH IN GOD. I will suppose that some one here is saying, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man": our text brings before us a wise man, who said this of himself, and yet had firm faith in God. If we have to say what Agur said, let us also trust as Agur did. If only wise men

might put their trust in God, what would become of nine out of ten of us?

I hope there is nobody here so foolish as to say, "I could trust in God if I were a man of mark." Ah, sirs! to be a man of mark is no help in the matter of faith. I hope no one is so silly as to say, "If I were possessed of great riches I could then come to Jesus." "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Nor may you say, "If I had great gifts I could trust in the Lord Christ." Talents involve responsibility, but they do not help towards salvation. Gifts may even drag a man down: only grace can lift him up. The gifted man may be so full of pride that he may never submit himself to the free grace gospel of our Lord Jesus.

I shall deal with more sensible objections than these. There are some who seem as if they could not trust Christ and believe in God, because they cannot go with other men in *their heights;* and there are others, strange to say, who have the same difficulty because they cannot follow others into *their depths.*

I will have a word, first, with those who say, "We cannot hope to be saved, because *we cannot reach the heights of other men.*" You have marked the holy conduct of certain godly men, and, setting your own imperfections side by side with their excellences, you have not only been humbled, but greatly discouraged. You have concluded that you could be saved if you were like these gracious men; but that, since you fall so far short of their noble character, you must be lost. You have seen them in sickness, and marked their patience and joy, and their acquiescence in the divine will, and you have been greatly humbled, which was well; but you have also fallen into unbelief, which was not well. Since you cannot play the man under fire as these champions do, you fear that you may not hope for eternal life.

Moreover, you have listened to their prayers; you have been edified, you have been aroused, and you have also been driven to tremble. Seeing Jacob in his wrestlings at Jabbok, you have cried, "Would God I could wrestle like that man; but, as I cannot, woe is me!'" You have noticed Daniel go to his chamber and cry unto his God three times a day, and then you have remembered your own forgetfulness and wandering thoughts in the matter of prayer, and you have concluded that you could have no hope of speeding at his throne of grace.

Other aspects of the piety of believers have also discouraged you. To see how they walk with God, how their speech is perfumed with love to Jesus, how their manner of life is above that of the world—all this has made you fear that you could never enter into their heritage. These gracious men seem so far above you, that you cry, "Surely I am more brutish than any man."

You have noticed, also, their usefulness—how many souls they have brought to Christ; how God has helped them to guide the bewildered, and to instruct the ignorant; and then you have felt that it was natural that such men should have confidence towards God; but as for yourself, what is the use of you? You have felt good for nothing in the presence of persons privileged to do so much for God and men.

You have been even more cast down when you have heard them talk of their high joys. The other day you met with one who wore heaven on his face, and you said to yourself, "I wish I knew such joy as beams in this man's countenance." You heard your minister describe the deep peace and holy calm which come with full assurance of faith; and every word he spoke about his own joy in the Lord was like a dagger at your heart; for you felt that you could not speak of such a blissful experience. You were never on the top of Tabor, never did you behold the transfigured Lord. You are afraid to trust God because you cannot compare with other men in their heights.

Carefully notice two or three little points which I will mention. First, remember that *you see these good people at their best.* You have not seen their seamy side. Perhaps they have not told you of how, at times, their feet were almost gone, their steps had well-nigh slipped. You see their days, and not their nights. I think it is a very sweet trait in your character that you do so. In this you differ from the wicked world. The ungodly always notice the bad points in the saints; they eat up the sins of God's people as they eat bread: it is nourishment to them. As for you, poor troubled one! you observe only the virtues of believers, and you overlook their shortcomings. Surely, God has wrought a change in you. In this there is some ground of hope: the Lord, who has taken away your envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, will remove the rest of your sins, if you bring them before him in repentant faith.

Recollect also, that *you now see men who have faith in God*, and you see in them the result of that faith. Do not imagine that their graces existed before their faith. If you have not the result of faith before you have faith itself, do not be astonished; they had not these excellences before they believed in Jesus. Some of the brightest of them were once the blackest of sinners. "Such were some of you," said Paul: "but ye are washed." Can it be a wise thing to say, "I have not those fruits of the Spirit, and therefore I will not cultivate the tree of faith from which they grow"? Nay, rather say, "The Lord, who made these men what they are, can make me what they are. He that could beautify them with righteousness, can also hang my neck with the jewels of holiness."

Do you not think it would be very great folly on your part if you should refrain from believing in the Lord Jesus, on the ground that *you had greater need to seek him than other men?* Because you lack these things which you see in the saints, and know that you can only have them of the Lord by faith, is that a reason why you should not go to God in faith? This is a grand argument for going at once. Should a man plead his poverty as a reason why he should not ask an alms? Is nakedness a reason for refusing to be dressed? Is hunger a motive for rejecting food? or sickness a motive for shutting out the physician? I argue in the opposite way. Your urgent need is the strongest reason why you should claim of the Lord by faith these promises which he has made to needy souls. If you are more brutish than any man, go to the Lord, that he may instruct you!

The greater your need, *the greater opportunity you have of glorifying God by believing in him for an all-sufficient supply.* If you lack all these

lovely and needful things, which you so much admire in others, it is a sad and grievous want; but if you can believe that the Lord of mercy can and will give you all, you will do great honour to his name. Is it not written, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God"? If you were a little sinner, and had little needs, God could only be a little merciful, and give you a little supply; but the more brutish you are, and the less of true understanding you have, the greater opportunity have you of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ by believing in him for the great things which you evidently need. If you are the greatest fool that ever lived, you will give to Christ all the more honour when you believe that he can make you wise unto salvation. God grant that the heights to which other men reach may never keep you back from faith in God, but may the rather urge you on to believe great things of God!

But, further, I said—and perhaps I surprised you—that *the depths of other men* have often kept tremblers from a simple faith in God. I know many who say, "I cannot feel as others feel—my heart is hard and insensible, and when I listen to what believers tell me of their sharp distresses, I fear that I cannot be saved; for into these deep places I have never gone." These depths are of many kinds; but the mention of one or two may suffice. Some believers have been brought to the Lord through fearful conviction of sin, conviction most overwhelming: they seem to have found their way to heaven round by the brink of hell. "Ah!" say you, "I was never thus shaken over the pit." Another, after he has been converted, experiences awful conflicts: from day to day he struggles with inbred corruptions, and therefore he goes sighing and crying to heaven. There is, among the best of men, an amount of sorrow which I need not here dwell upon. Ploughing, harrowing, scarifying, fall to the lot of the best of soils. Saints go through fire and through water, in their spiritual march to the land of bliss. Perhaps some of you escape these agonies, and know but little of the grinding process. Will you therefore fear to believe, because you think you are more unfeeling than other men? Will you refuse the cup of life because God has not infused all his bitters into it?

Hearken to me, ye that are so readily cast down: some of these depths you never need wish to know, for they would not be to your advantage, but to your loss. The dark side of much that is called Christian experience is not the work of the Holy Spirit at all. In many, it is occasioned by a natural crabbedness of disposition: some are so hard that God must use iron wedges with them before their hearts will be reached. There are men with such a proud spirit, that they need to be brought down to feed swine before they will arise and go to their Father. Others are obstinate, and wear a brow of brass; and these must be made faint with labour before they will yield. In many instances, the mental distress which attends the work of the Spirit is produced by sickness of body: it is not repentance, but indigestion or some other evil agency depressing the spirits. A sluggish liver will produce most of those fearsome forebodings which we are so ready to regard as spiritual emotions. There is such a blending of the physical with the mental, that it is hard to name our feelings. All the experience

of a Christian man is not Christian experience. The troubled man experiences a good deal, not because he is a Christian, but because he is a man, a sickly man, a man inclined to melancholy. Why will you envy such a person? Do you want to feel his despondency? Do you really desire disease? Do you think you could trust God better if you had a morbid mind and a disordered body? What nonsense! I do not admire your taste; I think you are very foolish.

In multitudes of instances the strange depressions which befall some excellent people are the result of external trouble, of grinding poverty, of frequent bereavements, or of excessive labour. These things may greatly intensify the bitterness of spiritual distress. Do you want affliction? Do you really think that poverty or bankruptcy would help you to believe in God? Give some men a holiday by the sea, and their dark thoughts vanish. Were they ever desirable? In desiring what would only grieve you, you remind me of a child that would always cry, until its mother said, "What! Do you cry for nothing? You shall have something to cry for before long." If you covet grief, and even dare to threaten the Lord that you will not believe him unless he vexes you, it may be that he will deal with you according to your desires, and then you will cry in earnest on the other side of your mouth.

Frequently the great darkness through which many true people of God pass is occasioned by Satan. He delights to torment the child of God with blasphemous suggestions, or with foul imaginations. Do any of you say, because you are a stranger to this, "We cannot believe"? Why, dear soul, you must be out of your mind to talk so. Bless God with all your heart that you are a stranger to this horrible temptation. Never be so insane as to wish for this dreadful trial. These temptations may come quite soon enough. Desire them? Never, while reason remains to you!

Do you not think, too, that many are more deeply convinced of sin, and more seriously tried, and more fiercely tempted than others, because the Lord has a special design to answer in them? Even when the terrible searching work within is all real, you need not wish for it, for it may not be needful in your case, since God has not the same intention towards you that he has towards the much tempted one. Much more is wanted by way of foundation for a lofty tower than for a humble cottage; and so the grand public life of such a man may need more digging out by inward sorrow than your more private life can possibly require. Our Lord may also be shaping the tried soul for special work. If a man is to be a son of consolation to others, he must be much exercised himself. Barnabas must have tasted the wormwood and the gall, or he cannot mix the cup of consolation for others.

Remember that all Christians are not, and cannot be, of the same calibre. We are all soldiers, brethren; but we are not all champions. God calls upon everyone that believes in Christ to fight his battles, but many of us are happy to belong to the rank and file. We cannot all be captains. Only here and there shall we find a David, who, with his sling and his stone, shall go forth, a solitary champion, against gigantic Philistines. For David it was needful that he should fight

lions and bears in his youth, or he would not have faced the giant. If God sends us less of inward and outward trials than others, he knows best. We need enough sorrow to drive us from self and carnal confidence; and when that is effected, it would be folly to sigh for more. Our wisdom is to leave our experience with the Lord, who will appoint us sun or shade, as best will suit our growth. Let us envy no man his standing upon Tabor, or Pisgah; and, on the other hand, let us never desire to make excursions with the Lord's Jonahs, and go with them to the bottoms of the mountains. Seek not to copy another man's ups or downs; but wait on God, and put thy trust in him, even though thou shouldst seem to thyself to be more foolish than any other living man.

II. Secondly, and very briefly: A SENSE OF INFERIORITY MUST NOT KEEP US FROM LEARNING. Suppose you have to say, "I am more brutish than any man," you have so much the more need of being taught the things of God. If you have not the understanding of a man, there is so much more cause that you should go to school to the Holy Spirit, till the eyes of your understanding shall be enlightened, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Vital truth is simple. A great many things are hard to understand; but that which is essential to salvation is not difficult. To know thyself a sinner, and Christ a Saviour, is this a deep mystery? To quit thine own self, and thine own trusts, simply to rely upon the person and work of the Son of God, is this exceedingly difficult to understand? The safest truth is the simplest. Commonly an invention in machinery grows more simple as it nears perfection; and because God's way of salvation is perfect, therefore it is simplicity itself. You can know the gospel, for it is not a tough metaphysical problem, but a revelation which he that runs may read.

If thou art staggered by the sublimity of heavenly learning, consider that these things are revealed to babes. Our Lord said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Therefore, if you are more than ever conscious of your spiritual babyhood, be none the less assured that the Lord can and will reveal his truths to you.

Remember, also, that the Holy Ghost is a great Teacher. The best earthly teacher may be able to do very little with such slow scholars as we are; therefore let us go to our heavenly Teacher, that he may give us of his Spirit wherewith we may learn the truth. He can teach young men wisdom, and give to babes knowledge and discretion. When the Lord teaches, it is wonderful how quickly we learn. We have frequently met with young children deep-taught in the things of God, because the Holy Ghost has been their Teacher.

Let me comfort you by the remark that a sense of ignorance is a very good beginning for a learner. The door-step of the Palace of Wisdom is a humble sense of ignorance. When thou art empty of all fancied wisdom, there is room for God to fill thee with heavenly instruction. If thou art more brutish than any man, I should hope thou art more surely on the way to be made wise from the very foundation, by the teaching of the Spirit of God.

Hang your hope upon that promise: "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." You are one of those children, though you are a little one, and therefore you are included in the number of those who shall be taught of the Lord. The Lord will not give up one of the children of Zion as incorrigible. Dunces, whom no other master would tolerate, the gentle Spirit will tenderly instruct. Therefore I say unto you, let not a sense of inferiority keep you from following on to know the Lord.

III. I have been very brief upon that second point, and I must be much the same on the third: A SENSE OF INFERIORITY MUST NOT KEEP US BACK FROM SERVING GOD. What if, like Agur, we take the very lowest place; yet, like him, let us speak on God's behalf. Who knoweth, he may prophesy by us also? Agur's simple word is called "the prophecy." If God shall speak by thee, my friend, thy thinking so little of thyself will give a charm to thy speech. If God shall use such as thou art, he will have all the glory of it, will he not? When the Lord uses a very clever man, there is always the fear that people will ascribe the success to the human instrument. But when the Lord uses the man who owns himself to be a poor, foolish creature, then the honour is not divided, but all men see that this is the finger of God. The Lord loves to use tools which are not rusted with self-conceit. An axe which boasteth itself shall not be used upon the thick trees.

God can use inferior persons for grand purposes. He has often done so. Go into his armoury, and see how he has worked by flies and lice, by worms and caterpillars, by frogs and serpents. His greatest victories were won by a hammer and a tent-pin, by an ox-goad, by the jawbone of an ass, by a sling and a stone, and such like. His greatest prophets at the first tried to excuse themselves on the ground of unfitness. In the armoury of the Lord you will find few swords with golden scabbards, but you will find many unlikely weapons. God uses what no one else would look upon. The Lord can get much glory out of you, my poor desponding friend; wherefore, bestir yourself. Though you think yourself quite unworthy, go on in consecration of heart to yield yourself wholly to God, and he will not pass you by.

Bethink you yet again, the Lord does not expect of you more than you can do: it is accepted if it be according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. In building a house there must be the common bricks for the wall as well as the carved stone for the corner. Are you so ambitious that nothing but the chief place will suit you? Fie upon you! Let no man despise anything that may come in to complete the building of the house that God inhabits.

Suppose you feel that you are more brutish than any man, shall I give you a little advice? If you can do but little, make the best of yourself by intensity. In the natural world, that creature is most to be feared which is the most energetic, rather than that which is greatest. You shall find your life more in danger from the slender viper than from the huge ox. That which is the fullest of fire and energy will achieve the most. A small musket-ball in full career will do more execution than a great cannon-ball which lies still. Make the best

of yourself, also, by perseverance. If you are a little axe, and can give only a small chip at a time, keep on striking, and even the oak will yield to your blows. If you are only a drop, remember that constant dripping wears away stones. Keep on at holy service, and do so all the more because you do so little at any one time. Many littles will make much. Pence given every day will make pounds.

Make up by spiritual force what you lack in natural ability. If you lack talent, get all the more grace, and you will be no loser. If you love God more, even though you know less of science, you will live a successful, because a holy, life. If you have a greater love for the souls of your hearers than the man who has ten talents, you may be ten times more a soul-winner than he. It is spiritual power, not mental power, which avails in conversion.

Agur, a little further on in his one chapter, cheers up the humbler sort of people by his talk about little things. In his twenty-fourth verse, he says:—"There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer." You that cannot do very much, take care never to lose an opportunity. Make hay while the sun shines: seize the seasons, and turn them to account. If you were a great man, and could at one speech sway the minds of thousands, even then you ought not to be idle; but if you can only deal with one at a time, do not let that one escape you. Copy the bees and the ants; and use the summer hours right diligently.

Next, read verse twenty-six. You are feeble; but remember, "The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks." Keep to the rock, keep to eternal verities, keep to the things which cannot be moved. Never run away from the gospel. There is not much in *you*, but there is a great deal in Christ: always keep to him. You cannot say much; but let all you do say savour of Christ. Never quit the gospel, or you leave the rock of your shelter. Keep to the rocks, and you will do much good, and run no risk.

Next, if you are very little, you should, like the locusts, associate with others, and go forth in an orderly way to work. Make yourself useful by dropping into rank, and in holy companionship doing your part in connection with the rest. One locust is a thing to be laughed at; but when they go forth in bands, they make nations tremble. One believer may accomplish little; but in the ranks of the Sunday-school the many can do wonders.

Suppose you are as little thought of as a spider, yet copy the spider in the two things which Agur mentions. Take hold with your hands. Always be taking hold upon the promise of the great King by the hand of faith. Let your faith come out of your own heart, as the spider spins her web out of her own bowels. Be always hanging on to one promise or another, and constantly add to your holding. Have also a holy courage like the spider, who is in king's palaces. She is not satisfied with being hidden away in a barn or a cottage; she pays a visit to Solomon, and makes her abode in his painted halls. If you can go anywhere for Christ, go and spin your web of gospel from your inmost soul. Make up your mind that, whatever company you are in, you will begin to spin about Christ, and spin a

web, in which to catch a soul for your Lord. In this way, though you fear you are more foolish than any man, God will make as much use of you as if you were the wisest of men. I pray thee, O feeble one, render to thy Lord such service as thou canst.

IV. Lastly: A SENSE OF INFERIORITY MUST NOT HINDER OUR JOY IN THE LORD. Suppose you have to say, this morning, very groaningly, "I am more brutish than any man, I have not the understanding of a man." What then? Are you going to fret and worry about it? Will you, therefore, refuse to believe in your God? I do not see, if it be true to the fullest extent, that there is any reasonable cause for being cast down in reference to the Lord your God. Would you expect to be saved because you were *not* brutish? Would you look for heaven because you had a fine understanding, and could place a third of the letters of the alphabet at the end of your name? If everybody said, "What a highly-cultured man this is!" do you think heaven's gate would open any the more readily to you? You are on the wrong tack, my friend, if you think so. Capacities and attainments put plumes into the hat, but they do not protect the head from error.

Answer me this. Are not the little things in creation full of joy? Do not the dewdrops sparkle on the hedges? When the summer comes, walk down your garden, and see the thousands of gnats. What are they doing? They are dancing up and down in the sunbeams. The very midges are full of delight. Will you be shamed by a gnat or a midge? No! take you to dancing, too; but let it be like that of David when he danced before the ark of God. Rejoice in the Lord always. God gives small creatures great delight. Why should not you be as happy, after your measure, as the angels are? Little stars twinkle for very brightness. If you need humbler examples, look at the little birds, and hear how they sing. Great birds seldom have the gift of song. You may listen long before you will hear an ostrich or an emu singing. In our own farmyards neither the turkey nor the peacock charm us with their melody. Little birds awake the sun with their harmonies, and make the morning sacred with their psalmody. Tell me, you that feel as if you were less than the least, is there any reason why you should not rejoice in the Lord?

Who had most joy out of the Lord Jesus when he was here? Or rather, who expressed their delight most exultingly? It was not great Peter, nor active James, nor holy John, but it was the children in the temple.

> "Children of Jerusalem
> Sang the praise of Jesus' name."

They shouted "Hosanna!" "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he hath perfected *praise*," if nothing else. The little ones can praise, for they are happy in the sweet simplicity of their faith, and in the warmth of their hearts. My dear friend, do the same. Delight thyself also in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord, and express your gladness.

"Ah, sir! I am foolish and ignorant." Yes, but did you notice in the seventy-third Psalm, which we read just now, that I called your attention to the singular language used by Asaph? He says, "So

foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand." God takes care of the foolish, and guards the feeble folk: wherefore, let them rest in his love, and be glad in his care.

Remember, that if, by reason of our inferiority, you and I have to take a back seat, the back seats are still in the house. Our littleness does not alter God's promise. It is the same promise to the small as to the great; to the weak as to the strong. Our deficiency does not alter our God. He is as full of grace and truth as ever. He does not increase because we are enlarged; neither is he diminished because we have declined. My God, as a babe in grace, is the same God as those rejoice in who have attained to fulness of stature in Christ Jesus. What a blessed God we have! Only to think of him is hope; to know him is fruition. "Yea, mine own God is he," said David; and he could never have uttered a grander word. "This God is our God for ever and ever," is a sentence which might as fairly have been spoken in heaven as upon this lower earth. It has a glory tone about it. Come, ye little ones, ye backward ones, ye foolish ones, dwell upon the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, with your hearts' delight. The triune God is yours, your Father, your Redeemer, your Comforter: a triple blessing is thus secured to you; let your triple nature of body, soul, and spirit rejoice therein.

This makes no difference to the covenant of grace. Babes in their long-clothes, if they are heirs, have quite as sure a right to their inheritance as have those who are of full age. One is as legally protected as one-and-twenty. The children cannot yet take full possession by reason of their tender years; but the law defies a rogue to rob even an infant heir of his lawful patrimony. Enjoy you, therefore, O you little ones, the infinite wealth of the covenant, and doubt not your right and title in Christ Jesus!

However little you may be, this makes no difference to God's love to you. Ask yourselves, do you love that full-grown son of yours of twenty-five so much that you have the less love left for your chubby little boy at home of two or three? Bless his little heart! when he climbs your knee to-day, and asks whether you have a kiss for him, will you answer, "No, Johnny, I cannot love you, for you are so little that I give all my love to your older brother, because he knows so much more than you do, and can be so useful to me"? Oh, no; you love the last one, perhaps, better than any of them: certainly not less. They say that if there be a child in the family who is a little weak, the mother always loves it most. It is so with our God; he is most tender and most gracious to the weakest and least known. Our Shepherd carrieth the lambs in his bosom, and doth gently lead those that are with young: wherefore, be not cast down because of your conscious inferiority, but admire the condescending grace of God.

If you feel that you are more brutish than anybody else, yet believe in God up to the hilt; believe in him and trust him with all your heart, and then feel all the more gratitude that he should have loved such a worthless one as you are. Feel all the more content with that free, rich, sovereign grace which has chosen you and ordained you to eternal life. Glorify God by your very weakness. Glory in your infirmity,

because the power of Christ doth rest upon you. Be all the more trustful in God since you have nothing in yourself to rely upon. Say, "The great ones may run alone, but I am a babe, and I must be carried in my Father's arms; therefore I will have the greater faith to match my greater need."

Our deep sense of folly and weakness should also keep us humble before the Lord. Where is room for boasting? What have we to glory in? We owe all to mercy, and to mercy shall be all the praise!

Lastly, be more tender to others who, like yourself, are feeble. It is wonderful how gracious little ones care for other little ones, sympathize with them, pray for them, and comfort them. I believe that the saying is strictly true, that "the poor help the poor"; and I know it is so among the spiritually poor. High and mighty ones cannot help downcast saints: only those who have been afflicted can console the afflicted. In the East, among the Bedouins, in a shepherd's family, the little children, as soon as they can walk, learn to keep the lambs. You see, the little boy who can only go slowly can lead the little lambs admirably, for he and they go well together. The big father would have taken long strides, and so have tired the little lambs; but his little son can only go at a slow pace, and that pace suits the lambs. The weak lambs are pleased with their little shepherd, who is a lamb like themselves: he is fond of the lambs, and the lambs feel at home with him. So, dear friends, if the Lord permits you to be among the little ones, look after the little ones; and whereas some would have to bend their backs too much to look after the lowly, you are on their level, and will naturally care for their state. Thus will you find your sphere of usefulness, and in it you will earn to yourselves a good degree. Though, like Agur, you feel more brutish than any man, you will so live that nobody would have thought so if you had not told them; and few will believe it when you do tell them. To God alone be glory. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxiii.; Proverbs xxx. 1—9.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—122 (Song I.), 398, 616.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE QUESTION OF QUESTIONS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 4TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Morning, April 20th, 1890.

"Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"—John ix. 35.

THE eye of the Lord Jesus is always on his chosen, and he knows every circumstance which occurs to them. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out." Our Lord had done too much for this man to forget him. Where grace has wrought a great work its memory lingers; as it is written, "Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands." In this let us take comfort: if anything has happened to grieve us, Jesus has heard of it, and will act accordingly.

Our Lord sought for the outcast one. Unasked, he had opened his eyes; unsought, he looks after him in his hour of trouble. He was not easy to find; but our Lord is great at searching out his lost sheep, and he persevered until he found him. If we, at any time, should seem cast off from Christ as well as cast out by proud religionists, he will find us when we cannot find him. Blessed be his name!

Our Lord's object was to do this man real service; he had been cast out of the synagogue, and he therefore needed comfort; but it would be a grand thing so to comfort him as to lead him onward and upward in the divine life. Our Lord's way of comforting was to ask a question which would lead to heart-searching, and suggest spiritual advance. It is not the way that you and I might take; but his ways are not our ways, neither are his thoughts our thoughts. Wisdom is justified of her methods. It is the best thing, when a man is in soul trouble, to make him look to his own condition before God, and specially to his faith; for when he finds that he is right on the main point, this assurance will be to him a well-spring of comfort. We are sure that our Lord took the very best means to bring this man to well-grounded confidence when he said to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" He helped him by this question to make a considerable advance in faith; for, although the poor man had believed

in Jesus up to the measure of his knowledge, his knowledge had been slender; but now he was to learn that the opener of his eyes was the Son of God. This is such faith as the person of our Lord deserves, but such as many have never rendered to him, and for lack of this they miss the great power of his grace. The man was excommunicated, and was then placed under the ban of the Jewish church; but trust in the Son of God would quickly remove from him any alarm which he might feel on that account. He that enjoys the favour of the Son of God will not tremble at the frown of the Sanhedrim.

Oh, that the Lord would comfort many this morning, while I press upon each one of you this one personal question, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" To young and old, to rich and poor, I shall direct this solemn enquiry. It is not a perplexing question upon an abstruse point, but a simple and urgent enquiry relating to everybody here present. It is not a problem profound and intricate—a question of free-will or predestination, of post-millennial or pre-millennial advents; it is a practical question, pressing and present, and one that concerns every man in his every-day life, at this very moment. I wish you each one to think that I now put my hand on your shoulder, and look you in the face, and say earnestly, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" This is not a question out of which angry controversy can possibly arise; for it has to do with yourself, and yourself only. Whatever discussion there may be will be confined within your own bosom. It concerns yourself only, and it is put in the singular, "Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God?" It was put by Jesus himself to this man: consider, then, that Jesus puts it to you also this morning, even to you, apart even from your wife or friend.

I. I shall begin pressing home the question, by the help of the Holy Spirit, by making the remark that THE QUESTION NEEDS TO BE RAISED. It must not be taken for granted that you do believe on the Son of God. "Oh, yes, I am a Christian," says one, "I was born in a Christian country, I was taken to church while a babe, and was duly christened, and I now repeat the creed. Surely this is sufficient proof of my faith!" Or possibly you say, "My mother took me to the meeting-house before I could walk, and ever since I have never quitted the ways of old-fashioned Nonconformity." All this may be so, but it is not to the point. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" This is a spiritual and vital question which cannot be thus set aside. You reply, "My moral character has always been correct; in business I have always discharged my liabilities, and I have always been ready to help every charitable institution." I am glad to hear all this. Still, it does not touch the matter now in hand; this query goes deeper than outward conduct. Hear it again—"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

Numbers of moral, amiable, generous, and even religious people have not believed on the Son of God. Excuse me, I cannot let you slip through in the crowd, I must lay hold upon you with a holy vehemence, that even forgets courtesy for the moment, and I must say to the best of you, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

Though this man had been scrupulously obedient, yet our Lord asked the question. It may be, I speak to some who say, "I have been at all

times obedient to the duties of religion. Whatever I have found to be commanded of God in his Word, I have carefully carried out." Was it not so with this man born blind? The Saviour put clay upon his eyes, and told him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash off the clay, and the man did exactly as he was told. He did not go to another pool, but to the pool of Siloam; and he did not attempt to get the clay from his eyes by any other process than that of washing. He was very obedient to Christ; yet the Lord said to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" No outward observances, however carefully carried out, will obviate the need of the enquiry, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" I am afraid some of you have *not* been very careful in fulfilling outward ordinances, and for this you are blameworthy; but if you had been scrupulously exact, yet no outward observances, however carefully followed out, can exempt you from the question, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

This man, in addition, *had passed through a very remarkable experience.* He could say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." He could never forget that long night, while a child, a youth, and a man. All those years no ray of light had ever gladdened him: to him night and day were much the same; he had sat in deep poverty all through that dreary darkness, and learned no art but that of beggary. As the cooling water touched his eyes, and washed away the clay, the sunlight streamed in upon the lifelong midnight; and he saw. He had undergone all that change, and yet the Saviour said to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" So, my dear hearer, you may be a very altered man, and yet you may not be a believer on the Son of God. You, my dear sister, may be a very different woman from what you used to be; and when you tell your experience, it may be very remarkable, and well worthy of being recorded in a book; and yet this question must be pressed upon you! Whatever your experience may be, do not forget self-examination. Say not, "I never need question myself: such experience as I have had, settles my position out of hand. I am not so childish as to look within, or have a doubt about my faith. So remarkable a case as mine may not be suspected." Talk not so; for if our Lord, who knew the change this man had undergone, yet said to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" I also must take liberty to press home, upon the most remarkable person here, the same personal enquiry—"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

This man, in addition to his reception of bodily sight, *had exercised a degree of faith in the Lord Jesus.* If you follow the chapter through, you will see that he had some sort of faith in Christ while he was blind, or he would not have gone to Siloam to wash away the clay. And when he saw, he did not doubt that Jesus had really made him whole; and he avowed the fact. He also said, "He is a prophet." He went further still, for he said, "If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." He had believed as far as his light helped him to believe; so that the germs of faith were in him. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ pressed him with the enquiry, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Beloved friends, you, too, may never have been troubled with scepticism; it may be, you have not even examined the grounds of your faith, because you have never been tempted to suspect

them. You have taken in the gospel from your youth as clearly true, and so you have believed it without being much perplexed. I am thankful that you have done so. Still, do you believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God? Is Jesus God to you? Do you trust him as able to do anything and everything for you? Is he to you "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him"? If not, may the Lord help you to take this higher step; for, short of this, you have not received the true Christ of God. It is of very small avail to say, "Oh, yes, I believe in Christ, the noblest of examples; I believe in Christ, the most instructive of prophets"; dost thou believe in him also *as the Sacrifice*, as the Priest, the Saviour, the Salvation? And, gathering all up in one, dost thou believe in him *as the Son of God?* Dost thou believe in the Son of God, as revealed in Holy Scripture?

Furthermore, this man *had spoken out bravely for Christ*, as you saw in the chapter which we read just now. "He spoke out like a Trojan," said one. Say, rather, "like a Spartan." He was cute, shrewd, sharp, and unanswerable. The learned doctors were nowhere in comparison with the blind beggar whose eyes had been opened. He stood up for the man who had given him sight, and allowed no charge to lie against him. His statements were short, but full; and his answers were themselves unanswerable. Who would have thought that a blind beggar could have fashioned such a logical argument as he did? Yet to this bold confessor the Saviour had to say, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Ah, my friend! as a preacher you may be able to declare the gospel very clearly to others, and you may enforce it with powerful arguments; but "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Even in your case, the question must be plied. Some of you may remember that story which is told in one of Krummacher's books. I half forget it myself, but it was somewhat on this wise. The preacher had delivered himself of a solemn discourse, and was waited upon, on the following Monday, by one of his hearers, who said, "Sir, if what you said last Sunday was true, what will become *of us?*" Now, if he had said, "What will become of *me?*" the preacher would have explained still further to him the gospel, in the usual way. As it was, he parried the word "us"; but his visitor, almost unconsciously, said, "Alas, dear sir! if these things be so, what shall we do?" The Lord used that plural pronoun to the awakening of the preacher, who had not been converted, though he thought he had been. Oh, that we who speak for God may also hear the Lord speak to us! I know the good preacher, and love him right well, who, when he was himself preaching, as he had done for years, was saved through the personal application of his own sermon. He is a minister of the Church of England, but he did not know the Lord. While he was preaching, the Lord applied to his heart with power a gospel truth, which so affected him, that he spoke with the accent of conviction which is natural to the renewed man. At last a Methodist, who was in the church, shouted out, "The parson's converted; hallelujah!" and all the people broke out with cries of praise. The preacher himself joined in the universal joy, and they sang together, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!" Oh, what a mercy it is, when the waiter at the Lord's feast is himself fed! Should not those who are to bear the healing balm to the sick

be themselves healed? I have not been ashamed to speak in my Lord's name, nor have I blushed to defend his cause before his enemies; yet I would remember that I may have done all this, and yet I may not know the King to whom I have been a herald. O friends, how terrible it would be to have cast out devils in his name, and yet to be unknown of him! Therefore, we press the question, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

This man had gone further still; for *he had suffered for Christ.* He had been put out of the synagogue for bearing witness to the power of Jesus; but none the less for this, he had to hear the question, "Dost thou believe?" Yes, you, dear friend, may have been laughed at by your relatives for your religiousness; you may have had to quit a good situation because of your determination to be honest, temperate, and pure; you may at the present moment stand under the ban of some cold-hearted church, because you have been more earnest than was desired; but much as I appreciate your fidelity, you must excuse me if I button-hole you in the Lord's name, and say, as Christ did to this man, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" It is one thing to play the hero before our fellow-men, and another to be true in the secret chamber of our own soul. You are bold in your confession, but do you really believe in the Lord Jesus? Can that bold confession be supported by your life? I hope you are not a Defender of the Faith after the manner of Henry the Eighth, who wore the title, but was by no means worthy of it. Come, my eloquent friend, do you live as you talk? Do you feel yourself as you would make me feel? "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

You will see, dear friends, from the run of my talk, that I am not for letting anybody here escape the personal question. My venerable friend, who has been an officer of this church longer than anybody else, will not refuse to ask himself this question. My beloved sister in Christ, who has conducted a Bible-class for years, and that other who has been so useful in the schools—neither of these will refuse to answer this searching word, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" I must dare to make enquiry of yonder minister. My father in Christ, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose, I must even ask of you, as I do ask of myself, "Dost thou, for thyself, in very deed, believe on the Son of God?"

This question must thus be raised, and raised for everybody, because many people nowadays do not believe on the Son of God. There are many about who would be mightily offended if we denied their right to the name of Christian, who nevertheless know not "the Son of God." These folks admire a man who will concoct a sermon to show that they may be Christians, and not believe on Jesus as God. I shall preach no such sermon until I lose my reason; but I shall press upon this unbelieving age this vital question, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Man, if thou dost not so believe, thy faith falls short of that which Christ would have thee possess, and thou hadst need take heed lest it fall short of landing thee in heaven. With a Saviour less than divine you have a religion less than saving. How is it with thee? Wilt thou believe on the Son of God alone, or run with the vain multitude, who see nothing in him but a man?

I think every man here will say, "You need not apologize, dear sir, for asking the question, for it is one we have to ask ourselves." Indeed, I know it is so. Who is there that lives after so pure a sort that he never has to try this issue? We have heard persons cry out against the hymn—

> "'Tis a point I long to know,
> Oft it causes anxious thought:
> Do I love the Lord or no?
> Am I his, or am I not?"

But if a man never has an anxious thought about his state, I should have a great many anxious thoughts about him. One of our poets has well said—

> "He that never doubted of his state,
> He may, perhaps, he may too late."

There are so many things about us all which we need to mourn over, and these set us asking the questions, "Is my faith the faith which works by love, and purifies the soul? Do I truly believe on the Son of God?" At times we rejoice in an absolute certainty as to our faith in Christ, and the Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; but at other seasons we are exercised with great searchings of heart, and no question causes us greater anguish than this—"Do I believe on the Son of God?" It will be woe to us if, after all our profession, and experience, and effort, we should, after all, have no more than the name of faith, and the notion of faith, but be found devoid of the life of it in our souls. Yes, the enquiry of our text is a question which ought to be raised.

II. But, secondly, THE QUESTION CAN BE ANSWERED. I am sure it can be answered, or our Lord would not have asked it; for he was never so unpractical as to go about the world asking men questions about themselves which it was not possible to answer. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" is an inquiry to which you can give the answer if you will—"Yes" or "No." I beg to press you to practical action upon it.

It were, indeed, a most unhappy thing if this question could not be answered. Suppose we were condemned to live in a state of perpetual doubt as to our being believers in the Lord Jesus. This would involve an awakened man in a condition of constant anxiety. If I am not sure whether I am in the favour of God or not, I am in a condition of decided sorrow. I remember hearing a Christian minister say one day in company, that no man could be sure that he was saved. Then I wondered what he had to preach that was worth preaching; for, if we cannot know that we are saved, then we cannot be sure that we are at peace with God; and this is to be in jeopardy every hour. There can be no peace to the mind of the awakened man if he does not know that he is saved. It is like one at sea who is half afraid that his ship is out of the track, and may soon strike upon rock or quicksand, but is not quite sure whether it is so or not. The captain should take no rest till he has taken his bearings, and found out his position in reference to the dangers of the sea, and the hope of reaching the desired haven. To leave his position a moot

point, would be to continue in fear, and to court danger. To leave your faith in question is to imperil a vital point. He must be sadly seared in conscience who can leave this hinge of the soul's condition unexamined.

There is a possibility of knowing to a certainty that you believe on the Son of God. Did I say there is a possibility of it? *Thousands have attained to this certainty.* You can know that you believe on the Son of God as surely as you know that there is a Queen of England, or as surely as you know that you yourself exist; and this without falling into fanaticism or presumption. Many among us are so habituated to faith in the Lord Jesus, that we could no more question the existence of faith in our own hearts, than we could dispute the fact that our hearts beat. Such assured persons shirk no examination: for them, the more examination the better, for their hope has firm and deep foundations. They can give a reason for the hope that is in them. As sure as mathematical certainty is the confidence of the believer in the Lord Jesus; for we know whom we have believed, and we are persuaded that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him. There are believers in our Lord Jesus who have gone on for the space of thirty years without a doubt of their faith in him, because that faith has been in daily, happy exercise upon him. You can answer the question, "Dost thou believe?" because you are at this moment believing; distinctly and intensely believing. Those who abide in the light of God's countenance, and feel the Holy Spirit within them, bearing witness with their spirits, are in no doubt as to their possession of faith. If we feel a burning love to God, a growing hatred of sin, a struggle against the evil which is in the world, and somewhat of the likeness to Christ, we may safely infer that these fruits of faith come from the root of faith. By the work of the Holy Ghost upon life and heart we know and are sure that we have believed in Jesus as the Son of God. I hope I speak to many this morning who are enjoying assurance, and know that they have passed from death unto life.

It is with some a matter of consciousness. How do I know that I live, breathe, stand, walk? I cannot explain to you the mode by which I arrive at certainty on this matter, but I am quite sure that I do live and breathe, and so on. Indeed, the power to question the fact implies it. So a believer may be sure that he believes that Jesus is the Son of God; and while he may not be able to give logical proof, yet he may be none the less conscious in his own soul that it is even so; and he is correct in his assurance, for even the very power to be anxious after grace is an evidence of grace. If there is any question about whether you have been a believer or not for the last twenty years, do not fight that question out; but begin at once to believe, the Lord helping you. Turn your eye to the cross, and trust yourself wholly with Christ from this good hour, and then you will believe, and the act will shine out its own proof. Say from your heart—

> "Just as I am—without one plea,
> But that thy blood was shed for me,
> And that thou bid'st me come to thee—
> O Lamb of God, I come!"

Thus coming, you will know that you have come, and by continuing to come you will grow assured that you have come. Let not the past be the main enquiry, but settle the immediate present. May the Holy Ghost cause the sacred fire to burn, and then you will feel the flame before long. To say, "I do now believe on the Son of God," is the best way of answering the question about your condition.

If you want further help to solve the question, *there are marks and evidences of true faith* by which you can readily test yourself. Do you enquire, "Do I believe on the Son of God?" then answer this: Is Christ precious to you? For unto you who believe he is precious. If you love and prize him as the most precious thing in earth or heaven, you could not have this appreciation of him if you were not a believer. Tell me again, have you undergone the change called the new birth? Have you passed through a process which could be described as being brought out of darkness into marvellous light. If so, your new birth is a sure evidence of faith, for these things go together: while faith is a proof of regeneration, regeneration is also a proof that you have faith in the Son of God.

Again, are you obedient to Christ? for faith works by love, and purifies the soul. Is it so with you? Has sin become bitter? Do you loathe it? Has holiness become sweet? Do you follow after it? I do not ask whether you are perfect, but is the whole current of your soul towards being perfect? Can you say that if you could live entirely without sin it would be the greatest delight you could have? that absolute perfection would be heaven to you? Ah! then it shows which way your mind goes; it shows that there is a change of nature, for no unrenewed heart pines after perfect holiness. Your heart is bending towards Christ's perfect rule and sovereignty, and I am sure that you have believed that he is the Son of God. You are resting upon him with a true and living faith, if you take up his cross heartily and follow him. Again, do you love God? Do you love his people? "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Do you love his Word? Do you delight in his worship? Do you bow in patience before his rod, so that you take up the bitter cup and say, "Thy will be done"? These things prove that you have faith in Jesus. Look well to them.

But supposing, after using all enquiries and tests, you still say, "Sir, this is a grave question, and requires great care. I have not settled it yet"; then follow this man in his method. When he was asked, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" he turned to the Lord, and replied with another question to the Lord Jesus. *We may resort to Jesus for aid.* He who had once been blind eagerly asked, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" Turn, then, O enquirer, in the moment of thy distress, and cry, "Lord Jesus, I beseech thee teach me to know thee better, that I may have more faith in thee." Go to Jesus for faith in Jesus.

Moreover, *there are certain great truths upon which faith feeds*, and, to be sure that you have faith, you had better think of these truths. May the Lord be pleased especially to reveal himself to you, that you may know him, and thus may believe on him! O soul, you will not long be in any doubt if you perceive those glorious things which concern your Lord!

Know who he is, and what he is, and what he has done, and this will enable you to believe in him as the Son of God. As men were wont, when hardly pressed before the courts, to say, "I appeal unto Cæsar," so do you appeal unto Christ himself; and rest assured that in him you will find deliverance. If your faith is hidden from yourself it is not hidden from him; and if you cannot call it forth by thoughts of the work of grace within, turn your mind towards your Saviour and Covenant Head in heaven, and faith will open itself, as the cups of the flowers open to the sun. The question can be answered.

III. Thirdly, THE QUESTION SHOULD BE ANSWERED, AND SHOULD BE ANSWERED AT ONCE. If I could, I would concentrate all your thoughts upon this one investigation, which to each man so vitally concerns his own self—"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Answer this from your own soul. I am no father confessor; be father confessors to your own selves. Let each man give his verdict at the bar of his conscience. Answer also as in the presence of Christ; for, like the man in the narrative, thou art in his presence now. Answer for thyself before the heart-searching, rein-trying God. Answer it to men also, for this thy Saviour deserves of thee. Be not ashamed to say outright, "I do believe on the Son of God." This fact must not be hidden away in a corner. Remember how our Lord in Holy Scripture always puts open confession side by side with faith as a part of the plan of salvation. You will never find anywhere in the Word of God—He that believeth and takes the Lord's Supper shall be saved; but you do find it written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Why does baptism take such a prominent place? Partly because it is the ordained form of open confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The passage is parallel with that other, "He that with his heart believeth, and with his mouth maketh confession of him, shall be saved." What less can Christ expect than an outspoken faith, if there be any faith at all? Wilt thou bring to him who redeemed thee a cowardly faith? to him that intercedes for thee a dumb faith? to him that opened thine eyes a faith which dares not look thy fellow-men in the face? No, no; speak, and speak out, and let the world know that he who died on Calvary is to thee, if not to anybody else, the Son of God. The question ought to be answered; answered before men, and answered at once. Do not delay, but make haste to keep thy Lord's command.

The question ought to be answered at once, because *it is of first importance*. If you do not believe on the Son of God, where are you? You are not alive unto God, "For the just shall live by faith." You cannot stand, for it is written, "Thou standest by faith." You cannot work for God, for it is faith that works by love. Where is your justification if you have no faith? "We are justified by faith." Where is your sanctification? Does not the Lord say, "Sanctified by faith that is in me." Where is your salvation without faith? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." You cannot be or do anything acceptable without faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please God." You are in an evil case, and will soon be in a worse one unless you can say—"I believe that Jesus is the

Son of God, and I trust him as my all in all." He that does not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is under present condemnation; for "He that believeth not is condemned already." Condemned already: and, therefore, this question must be answered immediately, unless you are content to abide under wrath, content to live unreconciled to God. While sitting here you are in danger of the wrath to come. Can you be at ease?

Remember, you are losing time while you are in ignorance as to your faith. If you are not believing in Jesus you are spending your days in death, and in alienation from God. If it be a question whether you have believed on the Son of God, it is no question that you are losing comfort and happiness. If you go up and down this troubled world without a knowledge of your own salvation, without an assurance of your acceptance with God, you are losing power to honour the name of the Lord by a joyful conversation. You are in an inconsistent position, and in an inconvenient one. If you really have not believed in Jesus Christ the Son of God, you are resting short of eternal life. Meanwhile, you come up to the Lord's house and unite avowedly in worshipping him, while you deny him the first essential of true worship—namely, your faith in him.

Ah, dear friend! if thou hast not believed that Jesus is the Son of God, the hope that thou wilt ever do so grows fainter every day. The longer a man lingers in any state, the more likely it is that he will continue there. When men have long been accustomed to do evil, the prophet cries over them, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" It is an awful thing to have heard the gospel long in vain. If even the appeals of Calvary are lost on you, what remains? Gospel-hardened sinners are hardened indeed. Some of you have been unbelievers in the Lord Jesus Christ for fifty years, and, I fear, will die in unbelief; and what then? The portion of unbelievers is terrible. "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Tremendous words! "Die in your sins." That is what will, in all probability, happen to many of you; nay, will surely happen unless you believe on the Son of God. Come, therefore, to this question at once. Do not delay for an hour. If the answer is unsatisfactory, the case can be altered if attended to at once. He that has not as yet believed on the Son of God, may yet do so. Still is time afforded you; do not despise the respite of mercy. Upon you shines the light of another Sabbath, long-suffering is not yet exhausted. The gospel is still preached in your ears, the day of hope is not over. The Bible is still open before you, and the gate of mercy is open also for all who will enter by faith. Wherefore, I pray you now believe on the Son of God. You may not live to see another Lord's-day; therefore snatch the present opportunity. Soon will the tidings come to us about you, as they have so often come about others, "He is dead," or "She has gone." Since eternity can be moulded by to-day, I pray you, arouse yourselves. Look to your faith in Jesus, for if that be right, all is well; but if that be found wanting, all is wanting.

IV. So I close with my fourth point, which is this: THE QUESTION MAY BE OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO US IF WE ANSWER IT.

"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Suppose that the question

has to be answered in the negative. If you are compelled to sigh, and say, "No, no!" then be it so, and look the truth in the face. It will tend to arouse you from your carelessness, if you know where you are. One came to join the Christian church the other day who said, "While I was at my work in the parlour, this thought suddenly came to me, 'You are an unsaved woman.' I could not shake it off. I went down to my cooking in the kitchen, but it followed me. From the fire and from the water I seemed to hear the accusation, 'You are an unsaved woman.' When I went in to my meals, I could scarcely eat my bread because of this choking thought. It haunted me, 'You are an unsaved woman!'" It was not long before that unsaved woman sought the Lord, and became a saved woman by faith in Christ Jesus. Oh, that I might put this idea into some minds this morning! You are an unsaved man; you do not believe on the Son of God; and therefore you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. I would like to make the seat you sit upon grow hard, and the very house to grow uncomfortable, so that you should vow, "Please God I can but stagger home, I will seek my bedside, and cry for mercy." I wish you were under even greater urgency, and would entreat the Lord for mercy at once, on the spot. You would do so, I think, if you fairly answered this question, and felt that the reply must be "No." But, supposing you are able to say "Yes," this question will have done great service, for it will have brought you great peace. As long as you leave this matter in doubt you will be tossed about; but when it is decided, you will enter into rest. Peace, like a river, shall flow into your soul when you can say,

> "I do believe, I will believe,
> That Jesus died for me;
> That on the cross he shed his blood,
> From sin to set me free."

Know that he is yours, and you will rejoice in him. You cannot obtain settled peace till you settle this question.

This done, you will try to do something for Jesus to show your gratitude for his salvation. Until I know that I am saved I shall have no heart for holy work. A wise man stops at home, and looks after his own concerns, while he feels that they are in peril; but when they are all safe, he can look to the interests of his neighbours. When I know I am saved, and that there is nothing more for me to do in that matter, for Christ has finished it all, then I enquire what I can do for him who has done so much for me. Where is the child or the man I can talk to about my Saviour? I will go and hunt up lost ones, and tell them of a present salvation. Perhaps I have never dared to speak to my wife or to my children about eternal life; but now that I possess it, and know that I do, because I believe on the Son of God, I will begin to instruct others in this good doctrine. Yes, diligence grows out of assurance.

And what a help assurance will be in the time of trouble! You have a great affliction coming on; but if you can say, "I know that I believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God," you will face it with quietness. Is it a surgical operation? You will lie still and yield yourself up to

the surgeon's knife, come life or death; and you will do it easily. Is it a cruel persecution which you have to face to-morrow? You will not be afraid; but, believing in Jesus, you will take up his cross. Are you growing old, and thinking of the time when you must die? It will not matter, for you know that you will only be going home, since you believe on the Son of God. He never lets a soul believe on him in vain. He never casts away a poor heart that trusts him. What strength your faith will give you! You will be a hero, whereas you might have been a coward. Now that you know, and are sure, that you believe on the Son of God, you will fear no evil.

This, I think, will fire you with holy zeal and praise. You have been saying, "I do not know how it is that I am so dull and stupid! I go to the house of God, and I do not feel the power of the Word: I am afraid I am not a Christian." Just so. As long as you have that chilling fear upon you, you will not be sensitive to the cheering truth; but when you know that you believe on the Son of God, and are sure of your salvation, your heart will beat to another tune, and the music of the upper spheres will take possession of your bosom. I should not wonder if you should sing, as Toplady does—

> "Yes, I to the end shall endure,
> As sure as the earnest is given;
> More happy, but not more secure,
> The glorified spirits in heaven."

You will begin to taste heavenly happiness when you have a sense of heavenly certainty. Being thus moved with gratitude, and filled with joy, the result will be a great concern for others who have not believed on the Son of God. You will look upon unbelievers with sorrow and alarm. They are very wealthy, perhaps; but you will despise their gold, because it blinds their eyes. They are very clever, perhaps, but you will not worship their abilities, because the eternal light is hid from their eyes. You will say to yourself, "They may have all their wealth, and all their cleverness, but I have the Son of God." In having Christ, you have more than Alexander possessed when he had won the world. He could conquer the earth, but he could not win heaven; for he knew nothing of believing on the Son of God. In this respect, you have done more than an angel could do; for an angel has no lost soul to trust with the Son of God, no sin to wash away in the Saviour's blood; but you have trusted him, and you have been washed in his blood, and you are clean. Go home and sing, my brother. Go home, and tell it out among your fellows, that Jesus is the Son of God, and abundantly able to save. Go home, and weep some poor sinner to Jesus. Go home, and never rest until you can say to God—"Here am I, and the souls that thou hast given me. We are believing on the Son of God." Peace be with you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John ix.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—906, 550, 549.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OUR LORD'S TRIUMPHANT ASCENSION.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 11TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Morning, April 27th, 1890.

"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."—Psalm lxviii. 18.

THE hill of Zion had been taken out of the hand of the Jebusites. They had held it long after the rest of the country had been subdued; but David at last had taken it from them. This was the mountain ordained of Jehovah of old to be the place of the Temple. David, therefore, with songs and shouts of rejoicing, brought up the ark from the abode of Obed-edom to the place where it should remain. That is the literal fact upon which the figure of the text is based. We are at no loss for the spiritual interpretation, for we turn to Ephesians iv. 8, where, quoting rather the sense of the passage than the exact words, Paul says, "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." The same sense is found in Colossians ii. 15: "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." Not misled by the will-o'-the-wisp of fancy, but guided by the clear light of the infallible Word, we see our way to expound our text. In the words of David we have an address to our Lord Jesus Christ, concerning his ascent to his glory. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."

Our Saviour *descended* when he came to the manger of Bethlehem, a babe; and further descended when he became "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He descended lower still when he was obedient to death, even the death of the cross; and further yet when his dead body was laid in the grave. Well saith our apostle, "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" Long and dark was the descent: there were no depths of humiliation, temptation, and affliction which he did not fathom. Seeing he stood in their place and stead, he went as

low as justice required that sinners should go who had dared to violate the law of God. The utmost abyss of desertion heard him cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Low in the grave he lay; but he had his face upward, for he could not see corruption.

On the third day he quitted the couch of the dead, and rose to the light of the living. He had commenced his glorious ascent. To prove how real was his resurrection, he stayed on earth some forty days, and showed himself to many witnesses. Magdalene and James saw him alone; the eleven beheld him in their midst; the two on the road conversed with him; five hundred brethren at once beheld him. He gave infallible proofs that he was really risen from the dead, and these remain with us unto this day as historic facts. He ate a piece of a broiled fish and of an honeycomb, to prove that he was no phantom. He said to the apostles, "Handle me, and see that it is I myself; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." One laid his finger in the print of the nails, and even thrust his hand into his side. Their very doubts were used to make the evidence clearer. The fact that Jesus died was put beyond question by the spear-thrust; and the fact that he was alive, in a material form, was equally well established by the touch of Thomas. Beyond a doubt, Christ Jesus has risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

This being settled beyond question, the time came for our Lord to continue his homeward, upward journey, and return unto the glory from which he had come down. From "the mount called Olivet," while his disciples surrounded him, "he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." The rest of his upward progress we cannot describe. Imagination and faith step in, and conceive of him as rising beyond all regions known to us, far above all imaginable height. He draws near to the suburbs of heaven; and surely the poet is not wrong when he says of the angels—

> "They brought his chariot from on high
> To bear him to his throne;
> Clapp'd their triumphant wings, and cried,
> 'The glorious work is done.'"

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in." How high he ascended after he passed the pearly portal Paul cannot tell us, save that he says "he ascended up far above all heavens," and describes him as "set at God's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion"; and as "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto." The man Christ Jesus has gone back to the place from whence his Godhead came. Thou art the King of glory, O Christ! Thou art the eternal Son of the Father! Thou sittest ever in the highest heaven, enthroned with all glory, clothed with all power, King of kings and Lord of lords. Unto thy name we humbly present our hallelujahs, both now and for ever.

I. Now, concerning the text itself, which speaks of the ascent of our ever blessed Lord, we shall say, first, that OUR LORD'S TRIUMPH WAS SET FORTH BY HIS ASCENSION.

He came here to fight the foes of God and man. It was a tremendous

battle, not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickednesses and evil powers. Our Lord fought against sin, and death, and hell, and hate of God, and love of falsehood. He came to earth to be our champion. For you and for me, beloved, he entered the lists, and wrestled till he sweat great drops of blood: yea, "he poured out his soul unto death." When he had ended the struggle he declared his victory by ascending to the Father's throne.

Now his descent is ended. There was no need for him to remain amid the men who despised him. The shame, and suffering, and blasphemy, and rebuke are far beneath him now. The sun has risen, and the darkness of night has fled. He has gone up beyond the reach of sneering Sadducees and accusing Pharisees. The traitor cannot again kiss him, Pilate cannot scourge him, Herod cannot mock him. He is far above the reach of priestly taunt and vulgar jest.

"No more the cruel spear,
The cross and nails no more;
For hell itself shakes at his frown,
And all the heavens adore."

Now, also, our Lord's work was done. We are sure that the purpose of his love is secure, or he would not have returned to his rest. The love that brought him here would have kept him here if all things necessary for our salvation had not been finished. Our Lord Jesus is no sudden enthusiast, who rashly commences an enterprise of which he wearies before it is accomplished. He does not give up a work which he has once undertaken. Because he said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do," and then ascended to the Father, I feel safe in asserting that all that was required of the Lord Christ for the overthrow of the powers of darkness is performed and endured: all that is needed for the salvation of his redeemed is fully done. Whatever was the design of Christ's death, it will be accomplished to the full; for had he not secured its accomplishment he would not have gone back. I do not believe in a defeated and disappointed Saviour, nor in a divine sacrifice which fails to effect its purpose. I do not believe in an atonement which is admirably wide but fatally ineffectual. I rejoice to hear my Lord say, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." Whatever was the purpose of the Christ of God in the great transaction of the cross, it must be fully effected: to conceive a failure, even of a partial kind, is scarcely reverent. Jesus has seen to it that in no point shall his work be frustrated. Nothing is left undone of all his covenanted engagements. "It is finished" is a description of every item of the divine labour; and, therefore, has he ascended on high. There are no dropped stitches in the robe of Christ. I say again, the love that brought our Lord here would have kept him here if he had not been absolutely sure that all his work and warfare for our salvation had been accomplished to the full.

Further, as we see here the ending of our Lord's descent and the accomplishment of his work, remember that *his ascent to the Father is representative.* Every believer rose with him, and grasped the inheritance. When he uprose, ascending high, he taught our feet the

way. At the last his people shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air, and so shall they be for ever with the Lord. He has made a stairway for his saints to climb to their felicity, and he has trodden it himself to assure us that the new and living way is available for us. In his ascension he bore all his people with him. As Levi was in the loins of Abraham, when Melchisedek met him, so were all the saints in the loins of Christ when he ascended up on high. Not one of the number shall fail to come where the head has entered, else were Jesus the head of an imperfect and mutilated body. Though you have no other means of getting to glory but faith in Jesus, that way will bring you there without fail. Not only will he not be in glory and leave us behind, but he cannot be so, since we are one with him; and where he is his people must be. We are in the highest glory in Jesus as our representative, and by faith we are raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenlies, even in him.

Our Lord's ascent is to the highest heaven. I have noticed this already; but let me remind you of it again, lest you miss an essential point. Our Lord Jesus is in no inferior place in the glory land. He was a servant here, but he is not so there. I know that he intercedes, and thus carries on a form of service on our behalf; but no strivings, and cryings, and tears are mingled with his present pleadings. With authority he pleads. He is a priest upon his throne, blending with his plea the authority of his personal merit. He saith, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"; and therefore he is glorious in his prayers for us. He is Lord of every place, and of everything; he guides the wheel of providence, and directs the flight of angels; his kingdom ruleth over all. He is exalted above every name that is named, and all things are put under him. Oh, what a Christ we have to trust in and to love!

And on this account *we are called upon in the text to think much of his blessed Person.* When we speak of what Christ has done, we must think much of the doing, but still more of the Doer. We must not forget the Benefactor in the benefits which come to us through him. Note well how David puts it. To him the Lord is first and most prominent. He sees him, he speaks to him. "*Thou* hast ascended on high. *Thou* hast led captivity captive. *Thou* hast received gifts for men." Three times he addresses him by that personal pronoun "thou." Dwell on the fact that he, the Son of David, who for our sakes came down on earth and lay in the manger, and hung upon a woman's breast, has gone up on high, into the glory infinite. He that trod the weary ways of Palestine now reigns as a King in his palace. He that sighed, and hungered, and wept, and bled, and died, is now above all heavens. Behold your Lord upon the cross—mark the five ghastly wounds, and all the shameful scourging and spitting which men have wrought upon him! See how that blessed body, prepared of the Holy Ghost for the indwelling of the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, was evil entreated! But there is an end to all this. "*Thou* hast ascended on high." He that was earth's scorn is now heaven's wonder. I saw thee laid in the tomb, wrapped about with ceroments, and embalmed in spices; but thou hast ascended on high, where death cannot touch thee. The Christ that was buried here is now

upon the throne. The heart which was broken here is palpitating in his bosom now, as full of love and condescension as when he dwelt among men. He has not forgotten us, for he has not forgotten himself, and we are part and parcel of himself. He is still mindful of Calvary and Gethsemane. Even when you are dazzled by the superlative splendour of his exalted state, still believe that he is a brother born for adversity.

Let us rejoice in the ascent of Christ as being the ensign of his victory, and the symbol thereof. He has accomplished his work. If thou hadst not led captivity captive, O Christ, thou hadst never ascended on high; and if thou hadst not won gifts of salvation for the sins of men, thou hadst been here still suffering! Thou wouldst never have relinquished thy chosen task if thou hadst not perfected it. Thou art so set on the salvation of men, that for the joy that was set before thee, thou didst endure the cross, despising the shame; and we know that all must have been achieved, or thou wouldst still be working out thy gracious enterprise. The voice of the ascension is—CONSUMMATUM EST: "It is finished."

II. Having led your thoughts that way, I would, secondly, remind you that THE LORD'S TRIUMPHAL ASCENT DEMONSTRATED THE DEFEAT OF ALL OUR FOES. "Thou hast led captivity captive" is as certain as "Thou hast ascended on high."

Brethren, *we were captives once*—captives to tyrants, who wrought us woe, and would soon have wrought us death. We were captives to sin, captives to Satan, and therefore captives under spiritual death. We were captives under divers lusts and imaginations of our own hearts: captives to error, captives to deceit. But the Lord Jesus Christ has led captivity captive. There is our comfort. Yet, forget not that we were hopeless captives to all these: they were too strong for us, and we could not escape from their cruel bondage.

The Lord Jesus, by his glorious victory here below, has subdued all our adversaries, and in his going up on high he has triumphed over them all, exhibiting them as trophies. The imagery may be illustrated by the triumph of Roman conquerors. They were wont to pass along the Via Sacra, and climb up to the Capitol, dragging at their chariot-wheels the vanquished princes with their hands bound behind their backs. All those powers which held you captive have been vanquished by Christ. Whatever form your spiritual slavery took, you are clean delivered from it; for the Lord Christ has made captives those whose captives you were. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Concerning Satan, our Lord has bruised his head beneath his heel. Death also is overcome, and his sting is taken away. Death is no more the king of dread: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Whatever there was or is, which can oppress our soul, and hold it in bondage, the Lord Jesus has subdued and made it captive to himself.

What then? Why, *henceforth the power of all our adversaries is broken.* Courage, Christians! you can fight your way to heaven, for the foes who dispute your passage have been already worsted in the field. They bear upon them the proofs of the valour of your leader. True,

the flock of the Lord is too feeble to force its way; but listen, "The Breaker is come up before them, and the King at the head of them." Easily may the sheep follow where the Shepherd breaks the way. We have but to follow those heavenly feet, which once were pierced, and none of our steps shall slide. Move on, O soldiers of Jesus, for your Captain cries, "Follow me!" Would he lead you into evil? Has he not said, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." Your Lord has set his foot on the necks of your enemies: you wage war with vanquished foes. What encouragement this glorious ascension of Christ should give to every tried believer!

Remember, again, that *the victory of our Lord Christ is the victory of all who are in him.* "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Now, the seed of the woman is, first of all, the Lord Jesus; but also, it is all who are in union with him. There are still two seeds in the world:—the seed of the serpent, and these cannot enter into this rest; and the seed of the woman, who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God: in these last is the living and incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever. Jesus, our Lord, represents them in all that he does—they died in him, were buried in him, are raised in him, and in the day when he triumphed, they led captivity captive in him. Looking at the great battle now raging in the world, I gaze with joyful confidence. We are fighting now with Popery, with Mahometanism, with idolatry in the foulest forms; but the battle is in effect won. We are struggling with the terrible infidelity which has fixed itself like a cancer upon the church of God, and our spirit sinks as we survey the horrors of this almost civil war. How often we groan because the battle does not go as we would desire it! Yet there is no reason for dismay. God is in no hurry as we are. He dwells in the leisure of eternity, and is not the prey of fear, as we are. We read concerning the multitude, when they needed to be fed, that Jesus asked Philip a question; but yet it is added, "Howbeit Jesus knew what he would do." So to-day the Lord may put many questions to his valiant ones, and "for the divisions of Reuben there may be great searchings of heart"; but he knows what he is going to do, and we may lay our heads upon his bosom and rest quiet. If he does not tell us how he will effect his purpose, yet assuredly he will not fail. His cause is sure to win the victory, for how can the Lord be defeated? A vanquished Christ! We have not yet learned to blaspheme, and so we put the notion far from us. No, brethren, by those bleeding hands and feet he has secured the struggle. By that side opened down to his heart we feel that his heart is fixed in our cause. Specially by his resurrection, and by his climbing to the throne of God, he has made the victory of his truth, the victory of his church, the victory of himself most sure and certain.

III. Let us notice, thirdly, that OUR LORD'S TRIUMPHANT ASCENSION WAS CELEBRATED BY GIFTS. The custom of bestowing gifts after victory was practised among the Easterns, according to the song of Deborah. Those to whom a triumph was decreed in old Rome scattered money among the populace. Sometimes it seemed as if every man in the city

was made rich by his share of the spoils of vanquished princes. Thus our Lord, when he ascended on high, received gifts for men, and scattered largess all around.

The psalm says: "Thou hast *received* gifts for men." The Hebrew hath it, "Thou hast received gifts in Adam"—that is, in human nature. Our Lord Christ had everything as Lord; but as the man, the Mediator, he has received gifts from the Father. "The King eternal, immortal, invisible," has bestowed upon his triumphant General a portion with the great, and he has ordained that he shall divide the spoil with the strong. This our Lord values, for he speaks of all that the Father has given him with the resolve that he will possess it.

When Paul quotes the passage, he says, "He *gave* gifts to men." Did Paul quote incorrectly? I trow not. He quoted, no doubt, from the Greek version. Is the Greek version therefore compatible with the Hebrew? Assuredly; for Dr. Owen says that the word rendered "received" may be read "gave." And if not, for Christ to receive for men is the same thing as to give to men, for he never receives for himself, but at once gives it to those who are in him. Paul looks to the central meaning of the passage, and gives us the heart and soul of its sense. He is not intending to quote it verbatim, but to give in brief its innermost teaching. Our Lord Jesus Christ has nothing which he does not give to his church. He gave himself *for* us, and he continues still to give himself *to* us. He receives the gift, but he only acts as the conduit-pipe, through which the grace of God flows to us. It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and of his fulness have all we received.

What are these great ascension gifts? I answer that *the sum of them is the Holy Spirit.* I invite your adoring attention to the sacred Trinity herein manifested to us. How delightful it is to see the Trinity working out in unity the salvation of men! "Thou hast ascended on high": there is Christ Jesus. "Thou hast received gifts for men": there is the Father, bestowing those gifts. The gift itself is the Holy Spirit. This is the great largess of Christ's ascension, which he bestowed on his church at Pentecost. Thus you have Father, Son, and Holy Spirit blessedly co-working for the benediction of men, the conquest of evil, the establishment of righteousness. O my soul, delight thyself in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One of the sins of modern theology is keeping these divine Persons in the background, so that they are scarcely mentioned in their several workings and offices. The theology which can feed your souls must be full of Godhead, and yield to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit perpetual praise.

Beloved, the gifts here spoken of are those brought by the Holy Spirit. "The water that I shall give him," said Christ, "shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." He said again, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." We read that he "spake of the Spirit, which they that believed on him should receive." "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" To conquer the world for Christ we need nothing but the Holy Spirit, and in the hour of his personal

victory he secured us this boon. If the Holy Spirit be but given we have in him all the weapons of our holy war.

But observe, according to Paul, these gifts which our Lord gave are *embodied in men;* for the Holy Spirit comes upon men whom he has chosen, and works through them according to his good pleasure. Hence he gave some, apostles, some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers. No one may be judged to be given of God to the church in any of these offices unless as the Spirit dwells upon him. All are given of God upon whom the Holy Spirit rests, whatever their office may be. It is ours to accept with great joy the men who are chosen and anointed to speak in the name of the Lord, be they what they may. Paul, Apollos, Cephas, they are all the gifts of the risen Christ to his redeemed ones, for their edifying and perfecting. The Holy Spirit, in proportion as he abides in these servants of God, makes them to be precious benisons of heaven to his people, and they become the champions by whom the world is subdued to the Lord Jesus Christ.

These gifts, given in the form of men, *are given for men.* Churches do not exist for preachers; but preachers for churches. We have sometimes feared that certain brethren thought that the assemblies of believers were formed to provide situations for clerical persons; but, indeed, it is not so. My brethren in the church, we who are your pastors are your servants for Christ's sake. Our rule is not that of lordship, but of love. Every God-sent minister, if he discharges his duty aright, waits upon the bride of Christ with loving diligence, and delights greatly to hear the Bridegroom's voice. I wish that you who talk of my Lord's servants as if they were rival performers would cease thus to profane the gifts of the ascended King. The varying abilities of those by whom the Lord builds up his church are all arranged by infinite wisdom, and it should be ours to make the most we can of them. Comparing and contrasting the Lord's gifts is unprofitable work. It is better to drink of the well of Elim than to grow hot and feverish in disputing as to whether it is better or worse than Beersheba or Sychar. One minister may be better for you than another; but another may be better for somebody else than the one you prefer. The least gifted may be essential to a certain class of mind; therefore, despise no one. When God gives gifts, shall you turn them over contemptuously, and say, "I like this well; but the other I like not"? Did the Father bestow these gifts upon his Son, and has the Holy Spirit put them into different earthen vessels that the excellency of the power might be of God; and will you begin judging them? No, Beloved, the Lord hath sent me to preach his gospel, and I rejoice to feel that I am sent for your sake. I entreat you to profit as much as you can by me by frequent hearing, by abounding faith, by practical obedience to the Word. Use all God's servants as you are able to profit by them. Hear them prayerfully, not for the indulgence of your curiosity, nor for the pleasing of your ear with rhetoric, but that you, through the Word of God, may feel his Spirit working in our hearts all the purpose of his will. Our conversion, sanctification, comfort, instruction, and usefulness, all come to us by the Holy Spirit, and that Spirit sends his powerful messages by the men whom he has given to be his mouths

to men. See how wonderful was that ascension of our Lord, in which he scattered down mercies so rich and appropriate among the sons of men. From his glorious elevation above all heavens, he sends forth pastors, and preachers, and evangelists, through whom the Holy Spirit works mightily in them that believe. By them he gathers the redeemed together, and builds them up as a church to his glory.

IV. I want the attention of all who are unconverted, for I have glorious tidings for them. To them I speak under my fourth head, OUR LORD'S TRIUMPH HAS A VERY SPECIAL BEARING.

"Thou hast received gifts *for men*," not for angels, not for devils, but for men—poor fallen men. I read not that it is said, "for bishops or ministers," but "for men"; and yet there is a special character mentioned. Does the text particularly mention "saints," or those that have not defiled their garments? No, I do not read of them here. What a strange sovereignty there is about the grace of God! Truly he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy; for in this instance he selects for special mention those that you and I would have passed over without a word. "*Yea, for the rebellious also.*" I must pause to brush my tears away. Where are you, ye rebels? Where are those who have lived in rebellion against God all their lives? Alas! you have been in open revolt against him: you have raged against him in your hearts, and spoken against him with your tongues. Some have sinned as drunkards, others have broken the laws of purity, truth, honesty. Many rebel against the light, violate conscience, and disobey the Word—these also are among the rebellious. So are the proud, the wrathful, the slothful, the profane, the unbelieving, the unjust. Hear, all of you, these words, and carry them home; and if they do not break your hearts with tender gratitude you are hard indeed. "Yea, for the rebellious also." When our Lord rode home in triumph he had a pitying heart towards the rebellious. When he entered the highest place to which he could ascend, he was still the sinner's friend. When all his pains and griefs were being rewarded with endless horror, he turned his eye upon those who had crucified him, and bestowed gifts upon them.

This description includes those who have rebelled against God, though once they professed to be his loyal subjects. Perhaps I am addressing some who have so far backslidden that they have thrown up all religion and have gone back into the world and its sins: these are apostates from the profession which once they made. To these I would give a word of encouragement, if they will turn to the Lord. Once upon a time, John Bunyan was under great temptation from the devil. This trial he records in his "Grace Abounding." He thought that God had given him up, and that he was cast away for ever; and yet he found hope in this text. I have copied out a little bit which refers to it:—"I feared also that this was the mark that the Lord did set on Cain, even continual fear and trembling under the heavy load of guilt that he had charged upon him for the blood of his brother Abel. Then did I wind and twine and shrink under the burden that was upon me, which burden did also so oppress me that I could neither stand, nor go, nor lie, either at rest or quiet. Yet that saying would sometimes come into my mind, 'He hath received

gifts for the rebellious.' Rebellious, thought I, why surely they are such as once were under subjection to their Prince, even those who, after they had sworn subjection to his government, have taken up arms against him; and this, thought I, is my very condition. Once I loved him, feared him, served him; but now I am a rebel, and I have sold him. I said, let him go if he will, but yet he has gifts for rebels; *and then why not for me?*"

Oh, that I could cause every despairing heart to reason in this way! Oh, that the Holy Spirit would put this argument into every troubled mind at this moment: "*And then why not for me?*" Come home, dear brother, come home, for there are gifts for the rebellious; *and why not for you?* I know you deserted the Lord's Table, but the Lord of the Table has not deserted you. I know you have, as far as you could, forsworn the name of Christ, and even wished you could be unbaptized: but that could not be, nor can the Lord leave you to perish. I know you have done evil with both hands eagerly; and perhaps now you are living in a known sin, and when you go home to-day you will see it before your eyes. Nevertheless, I charge you, return unto the Lord at once. Come to your Lord and Saviour, who still prays, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Behold how in his glory he "hath received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also." O my soul, I charge thee, on thine own account, hang on to this most precious declaration, for thou, too, hast been a rebel. Would God that all my brothers and sisters would be cheered by this dear word, and take it home to themselves with a believing repentance and a holy hatred of sin! I would print the words in stars across the brow of night. "*Yea, for the rebellious also.*"

V. I have done when I have handled the fifth point, which is this: OUR LORD'S TRIUMPHANT ASCENSION SECURES THE CONSUMMATION OF HIS WHOLE WORK. What doth it say? "That the Lord God might dwell among them." When our Lord Christ came here at the first he was willing enough to "dwell" among us; but it could not be. "The word was made flesh and tabernacled among us," like a Bedouin in his tent, but not as a dweller at home. He could not "dwell" here on that occasion. He was but a visitor, and badly treated at that. "There was no room for him in the inn," where everybody else was freely welcome. "He came unto his own"—surely they will lodge him, "but his own received him not." There was no room for him in the temple—there he had to use the scourge. There was no room for him in the open streets, for they took up stones to stone him. Out of the synagogue they hurried him, to cast him down headlong from the brow of the hill. "Away with him! Away with him!" was the cry of the ribald crowd. This dear visitor, who came here all unarmed, without sword or bow, they treated as though he had been a spy or an assassin, who had stolen among them to do them ill. And so they ran upon him with a spear, and he, quitting these inhospitable realms which knew him not, took home with him the marks of man's discourtesy. O earth, earth, how couldst thou drive away thy dearest friend, and compel him to be as a wayfaring man, that tarrieth but for a night; nay, worse, as a man astonied, who meets with wounding in the house of his friends?

After he had risen again, he went home, that from this throne he might direct a work by which earth should become a place where God could abide. Again is the temple of God to be with men, and he shall dwell among them. This world of ours has been sprinkled with the precious blood of the Lamb of God, and it is no longer as an unclean thing. Jesus is the Lamb of God who so taketh away the sin of the world that God can treat with men on terms of grace, and publish free salvation. The Lord God himself had long been a stranger in the land. Did not the holy man of old say, "I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were"? But Jesus, the ascended One, is pouring down such gifts upon this sin-smitten world, that it will yet become a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness and the God of righteousness.

This promise is partly fulfilled before your own eyes this day; for the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, and he has never returned. Jesus said, "He shall abide with you for ever." The Holy Dove has often been greatly grieved, but he has never spread his wings to depart. This is still the dispensation of the Spirit. You hardly need to pray to have the Spirit poured out; for that has been done. What you need is, a baptism of the Holy Spirit; namely, to go down personally into that glorious flood which has been poured forth. Oh, to be immersed into the Holy Ghost, and into fire: covered with his holy influence, "plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea, and lost in his immensity!" Here is our life and power, for thus the Lord God doth dwell among us. Ever since the ascension the Holy Ghost has remained among men, though he has not been, at all seasons, equally active. All through the night of Romanism, and the schoolmen, he still tarried: there were humble hearts which rejoiced to be his temples even in those doleful days. To-day he is still with his regenerated ones. In spite of impudent strivings against the divine inspiration of his Holy Scripture, and, notwithstanding the follies of ecclesiastical amusements, he is with his chosen. Lord, what is man that thy Spirit should dwell with him? But so it is; and this is why our Lord went up to Heaven and received divine gifts that by him the Lord God might dwell among us.

But there cometh a day when this shall be carried out to the letter. Methinks I hear the angels say, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Now, "in like manner" must mean in Person. In Person our Lord was taken up into heaven, and in Person he will come again; and when he cometh, the Lord God will, indeed, dwell among us. Oh, that the day would come! We wait and watch for his glorious appearing; for then will he dwell among men in a perfect fashion. What happy days shall we have when Jesus is here! What a millennium his presence will bring; there can be no such auspicious era without it, any more than there can be summer without the sun. He must come first, and then will the golden age begin. The central glory of that period shall be that the Lord is here. "The Lord God shall dwell among them." Then shall be heard the song which will never end, earth's homage to the Lord, who renewed the heavens and

the earth, and has taken up his dwelling in them. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." Up till now this work has been going on; but as yet it is incomplete. "Every prospect pleases, and only man is vile," is still most sadly true. The rankness of sin destroys the sweet odours of this world, so that the pure and holy God cannot abide in it; but since the Lord Jesus hath sweetened it with his sacred merits, and the Spirit is purifying it by his residence in men, the Lord smelleth a savour of rest, and he will not give up this poor fallen planet. Even now his angels come and go in heavenly traffic with the chosen. Soon the little boat of this globe shall be drawn nearer to the great ship, and earth shall lie alongside heaven. Then shall men praise God day and night in his temple. Heaven shall find her choristers among the ransomed from among men. The whole world shall be as a censer filled with incense for the Lord of hosts. All this will be because of those gifts received and bestowed by our Lord Jesus in the day when he returned to his glory, leading captivity captive. O Lord, hasten thy coming! We are sure that thine abiding presence and glorious reign will come in due season. Thy coming down secured thy going up: thy going up secures thy coming down again. Wherefore, we bless and magnify thee, O ascended Lord, with all our hearts, and rise after thee as thou dost draw us upward from grovelling things. So be it! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxviii.; Ephesians iv. 1—13.

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"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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THE SHINING OF THE FACE OF MOSES.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 18TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Morning, May 4th, 1890.

"And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him in mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face. But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him."—Exodus xxxiv. 29—35.

A FAST of forty days does not improve the appearance of a man's countenance: he looks starved, wrinkled, old, haggard. Moses had fasted forty days twice at the least; and according to many competent authorities the tenth chapter of Deuteronomy seems to imply that he fasted forty days three times in quick succession. I will not assert or deny the third forty days; but it is certain that, with a very slight interval, Moses fasted forty days, and then forty days more; and it is probable that to these must be added a third forty. Small attractiveness would naturally remain in a face which had endured so stern an ordeal; but the Lord whom he served made his face brilliant with an unusual lustre. The glory of the light of God upon his countenance may have been the reason why he remained so hale in after years of old age. This man of eighty spent forty years more in guiding Israel, and in the end his eye had not dimmed, nor his natural force abated. He that could fast forty days would be a hard morsel for death. Those eyes which had looked upon the glory of God were not likely to wax dim amid earthly scenes; and that natural force which had endured the vision of the supernatural could well support the fatigues of the wilderness. God so sustained his servant, that his long and repeated fasting, during which he did not even drink water, did no harm to his physical constitution. The abstinence even from water

renders the fast the more remarkable, and lifts it out of similarity to modern feats of fasting.

Moses did not know, at the time, that his face was shining; but he did know it afterwards, and he has here recorded it. He gives in detail the fact of the brightness of his own face, and how others were struck with it, and what he had to do in order to associate with them. We are sure that this record was not made by reason of vanity, for Moses writes about himself in great lowliness of spirit: it was written under divine direction, with a worthy object. The man Moses was very meek, and his meekness entered into his authorship, as into all the other acts of his life: we are therefore sure that this record is for our profit. I am afraid, brethren, that God could not afford to make our faces shine: we should grow too proud. It needs a very meek and lowly spirit to bear the shinings of God. We only read of two men whose faces shone, and both were very meek. The one is Moses, in the Old Testament; the other is Stephen, in the New, whose last words proved his meekness: for, when the Jews were stoning him, he prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Gentleness of nature and lowliness of mind are a fine background on which God may lay the brightness of his glory. Where these things abound, it may be safe for the Lord, not only to put his beauty upon a man, but also to make a record of the fact. Moses wrote this record with a reluctant pen. Since he did not write it out of vanity, let us not read it out of curiosity. He wrote it for our learning: let us learn by it; and may God the Holy Spirit cause our faces to shine to-day, as we read of the shining face of Moses!

It would appear, so far as we can make out the narrative, that his face continued to shine long afterward. After Moses had come down from the mount the brightness began to diminish. Paul tells us that it was a "glory to be done away"; but when he went into the holy place to commune with God the brightness was revived, and he came out again and spoke to the people with that same glowing heaven upon his brow. When he addressed the people in the name of God, he took off the vail, and let them see the brightness of God in his ambassador; but as soon as he had done speaking, and fell back into his own private character, he drew a vail over his face, that none might be kept at a distance thereby. The man Moses was as meek with the glory on his countenance as before it gathered there. God put great honour upon him, but he did not desire to make a display of that honour, nor childishly wish that it should be seen of men. For the people's sakes and for typical purposes, he veiled his face while in ordinary conversation with the people, and only unveiled it when he spoke in the name of the Lord. Brethren, if God honours you as preachers or teachers, accept the honour, but do not attribute it to your own worthiness, or even to your own personality; but ascribe it to the office to which the Lord has called you. "I magnify mine office," said Paul; but you never find Paul magnifying himself. He wears the glory as an ambassador of God, not as a private individual. The dignity that God gives to his servants is bestowed upon their office, not upon themselves apart from it. They must never run away with it into daily life, and think that they themselves are

"reverend," because their Lord is so; nor may they claim for their own thoughts the serious attention which they rightly demand for the Word of the Lord. Ministers do not pretend to be a class of sacred beings, like the Brahmins of India: the only vantage-ground they occupy is, that the Lord speaks through them according to the gift of his Holy Spirit. Unveiled are our faces when we speak *to* God and *for* God; but among our brethren we would hide away anything from which we might claim superiority for ourselves.

I. With this as my preface, I shall now come immediately to my subject. Here is Moses with a strange glory upon his countenance. We will first answer the question, HOW CAME THIS GLORY TO BE THERE? The skin of Moses' face shone: how came it to do so?

The answer is, first, *it was a reflection of the glory which he had seen when he was with God in the holy mount.* It was the result of that partly-answered prayer, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." God could not, at that time, grant the prayer in its fulness, for Moses was not capable of the vision; and the Lord told him, "Thou canst not see my face, and live." I look upon that prayer, however, as a very wonderful one, for this reason, that it was answered to the full, fourteen hundred years after it was presented. The glory of God is only to be seen in the face of Christ Jesus; and on the top of Tabor, Moses saw the Son of God transfigured, and his prayer was there and then answered to its utmost bounds. In the transfiguration, God showed to Moses his full glory; for he was then made able to behold it. But though on the top of mount Sinai he could not see the full glory of Jehovah, yet he had seen enough to make an impression upon him of such a kind that the skin of his face shone. God is light, and they that look upon him are enlightened, and reflect light around them. Moses spake with God face to face as a man speaketh with his friend, and this made his countenance glow. As the sun shining upon a reflector has its light thrown back again, often in a most brilliant fashion, so that the reflector looks like a minor sun; so was it with the face of Moses when it reflected the glory of the Lord. The face of Moses was to God what the moon is to the sun. A saint shines on men when God has shone on him. We are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the presence of the Lord. Would you shine in the valley? —first go up the mount, and commune with God. Would you shine, my brethren, with superior radiance? then be this your fervent prayer, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." If the Lord lift upon thee the light of *his* countenance, there will be no lack of light in *thy* countenance. In God's light thou shalt give light.

The light on the face of Moses was *the result of fellowship with God.* That fellowship was of no common order. It was special and distinguished. I do not doubt that Moses walked with God after the fashion of believing men in the pursuit of his daily calling; but he spent two periods, of forty days each, in solitary fellowship with God. Everybody was away; Aaron, Joshua, and all the rest were far down below, and Moses was alone with God. His intercourse with God was intense, close, and familiar; and that not for one day, but for eighty days, at the least. Protracted fellowship brings a nearness which brief communion cannot attain. Each morning's sun found him still in the

light of God; each evening's dew found his soul still saturated with the divine influence. What must be the effect of such whole-hearted, undisturbed fellowship with God? He heard no hum of the camp below; not even the lowing of cattle, or bleating of sheep came up from the foot of the mount. Moses had forgotten the world, save only as he pleaded for the people in an agony of prayer. No interests, either personal or family, disturbed his communion; he was oblivious of everything but Jehovah, the Glorious One, who completely overshadowed him. Oh, for the enjoyment of such heavenly communion! My brothers and sisters, have we not lost a great deal by so seldom dwelling apart, so little seeking continuous, absorbing fellowship with the Most High? I am sure we have. We snatch a hasty minute of prayer; we afford a hurried quarter of an hour for Bible reading, and we think we have done well. Very far am I from saying that it is not well. But if for minutes we had hours, the gain might increase in proportion. Oh, for nights of prayer! Oh, for the close shutting of the closet door, and a believing drawing nigh to God! There is no limit to the power we might obtain if such were the case. Though our faces might not be lit up with splendour, our lives would shine, our characters would become more pure and transparent; and our whole spirit would be so heavenly, that men would regard with wonder the brightness of our being. Thus, you see, the face of Moses shone because he had long looked upon the face of God.

I would have you note that this communion with God *included intense intercession for the people*. God will not have fellowship with our selfishness. Moses came out of himself, and became an intense pleader for the people; and thus he became like the Son of God, and the glory descended on him. How he pleaded! With what sighs and cries he besought Jehovah not to destroy the men who had vexed his Holy Spirit! They had degraded the Godhead by likening it unto a bullock which eateth grass. They made a calf in Horeb, and bowed before it, saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel"! Moses pleaded for the people down below, and not for himself. Here is a point in which, it may be, we fail. The Lord turned again the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends. The Lord loves intercessory prayer; and if ever he makes a man's face to shine, it is when he, like Christ, has made intercession for the transgressors, and poured out his soul, not for himself, but for a guilty company.

More than that. In that intercession Moses had *exhibited a degree of self-abnegation reaching to the sublime*. God said to him, "Let me alone, that I may destroy them. I will make of thee a great nation." The Lord's covenant with Abraham was that Abraham's seed should possess the land; but the Lord might have destroyed all the existing tribes except Moses, and then have made of the family of Moses a race in which the covenant with Abraham could have been kept to the letter. What a prospect was set before him! The children of Moses should grow into an elect nation, heirs of all the promises of God. But no: Moses not only goes the length of putting aside the proffered honour, but he cries, "Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Instead of his name being written in the place of the people, he would let their names stand at the expense of his own. When

a man can come to that, he is the man the skin of whose face is a fit parchment on which God may write the glory of his love. The less of self the more of God. When we can renounce all for God's glory and the good of his church, the Lord will not fail to smile upon us.

Yet once more. This man Moses not only obtained this brightness by his long communion and his intercessory prayer and self-oblivion, but by *his faithfulness among the people.* When he went down in the interval between the two fastings, and found the people worshipping the golden calf, he did not spare them. He loved them, but he did not keep back the stern blow of justice. He said, "Who is on the Lord's side?" And there came to him the tribe of Levi, and he said, "Go through the camp, and slay every man his brother who shall be found rebelling against the Lord." At once they cut off the idolaters, who were guilty of open treason against the King of Israel. But this was not enough: the whole nation must be chastened for its great sin, and humbled by a symbolical punishment. I think I see Moses, having broken the tables in his holy wrath, now taking down their idol god, grinding it, pounding it, dissolving it in water, and sternly compelling the tribes to drink of the water. He made a nauseous, bitter draught out of their idol, and made them drink it, so that their bellies might be filled with their own iniquity, and they might know what it was to turn away from the Lord their God. Grand old Moses! Faithful servant of God! Unbending executioner of divine justice! Meek wert thou, but by no means indifferent to truth and righteousness. God chooses not milksops, destitute of backbone, to wear his glory upon their faces. We have plenty of men made of sugar, nowadays, that melt into the stream of popular opinion; but these shall never ascend into the hill of the Lord, nor stand in his holy place, nor wear the tokens of his glory. O my brother, it is needful that thou be true to the Lord in public if thou wouldst have his fellowship in private. If the Lord can challenge thee for thine unfaithfulness among men, he will never honour thee with his own peculiar seal of light. Moses was no trimmer, no hunter after popularity; but he was sternly true to his Lord, and hence he was such that the Lord could safely make his face to shine. Enough of this, though much more might be said: learn the useful lesson which this part of the subject teaches.

II. But, secondly, WHAT DID THIS SHINING OF HIS FACE MEAN? This brightness on his face—what did it signify?

Very briefly, it meant this: *God's special favour for Moses.* God seemed to say, "This is my man: I have chosen him above all others: among those that are born of women there is no greater than he: I have put a measure of my own glory upon him, and the token thereof shines in his face."

Surely, it also meant *special favour for Israel.* If they could but have understood it, they would not have been afraid; but conscience made them cowards. God, in effect, said to them, by the shining of the face of Moses, "I have had favour upon you, for I have accepted your intercessor. My servant Moses has been pleading for your lives, and in proof that I have accepted you and will spare you, I have written your pardon across his shining brow." Favour to the Lord Jesus is

favour to us. Lord, when I hear thee say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," I rejoice that thou art well pleased with me in Christ Jesus. When God looks on the face of his Anointed, he looks with favour upon us.

This brightness on the face of Moses was also *God's witness to his commission.* He had sent him, for he had glorified him. The people could not doubt his commission when they looked upon his shining face. I suppose rays of light proceeded from it. Michael Angelo, in his famous statue of Moses, represents him with horns: the strange fancy is founded on the Vulgate version, which mistook the meaning of a Hebrew word, and translated it "horns." Beams of light seemed to rise from that marvellous face: a halo of glory surrounded that solemn countenance, and the people could not but perceive that this was a man on whom God had looked.

And more. It was not only a witness of his office, but it was *an increase of his power.* The people were overawed by this strange light. They dared, even after this, to murmur against Moses, for they dared to murmur against God himself; but, still, to a people of such a temper as theirs, the supernatural light must have been a source of wonder and of awe.

> "They gazed and looked, and lo, on brow and face,
> A glory and a brightness not of earth,
> The eye lit up with fire of heavenly birth,
> The whole man bright with beams of God's great grace."

It gave their prophet authority with them; it made them tremble before him. They would not dare to contradict one who looked on them with such a face of glory: his speech was as a flame of fire, because his face was on a blaze.

The pith of the whole thing, I think, lies in this—*the face of Moses shone typically, to show us that there is a great glory about the law of God.* It has a glory all its own from its spirituality, its holiness, its perfectness, its justice, its immutability, its power over the conscience, and so forth. It has eminent glory, because it has been ordained of God himself, and therefore stands as the sacred rule of the universe. But this is not what Paul understands by the glory of the law. He makes the glory "of that which was to be abolished," the glory of the ceremonial law, to lie in its end. Now, the end of the law for righteousness is Christ. The law is given to point us to Christ, to drive us to Christ, to be our schoolmaster to whip us to Christ, to convince us of our need of Christ, and to shut us out from every other hope but that which begins and ends with Christ. The glory of the law is Christ. And so Moses comes with a glory on his face which the children of Israel could not perceive, nor steadfastly look into.

> "They looked and saw the glory, and they shrank
> From that dread vision, dazzling man's frail sight."

Even as to-day men see outward rites that God has given, but see not their glorious meaning, so was it with Israel in the wilderness: they saw sacrifices, but they knew not the Great Sacrifice; they saw the oil and the water, but they knew not the Holy Ghost; they saw ten

thousand tokens dear and manifest of the ever-blessed Messiah, but they did not perceive him so as to know him when he came. Every type and ceremony might say, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The law is overlaid with the glory of Christ, as the face of Moses was covered with light. This is the deepest and innermost meaning of the sacred light which glowed upon the skin of the face of Moses.

III. And now, thirdly. This glory upon the face of Moses—WHY DID NOT MOSES KNOW OF IT? For we read that "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone."

I answer, first, that *it is not easy for a man to see his own face*, unless he can borrow a looking-glass. Speaking in parable, the meaning I intend is this: it is not easy for a man to form an accurate judgment of his own character. There are people in the world who think they see their own faces clearly, and that they shine like suns; and yet they do not shine at all, except it be with brazen impudence and self-conceit. In other cases, lowly men are afraid that their faces do not shine at all; and yet they are brightness itself. It is no small part of the shining of some faces that their owners are modest and humble. Brethren, you cannot see your own faces; and until you can do so, you must not imagine that you know your own characters. Upon reflection, you may arrive at something like a judgment, but it is not one which you may safely rely upon. Since Moses had no looking-glass, how could he tell that the skin of his face shone? Our own judgment of our own character usually errs on the side of partiality to ourselves. Nor is the evil so readily cured as some suppose, for the gift of seeing ourselves "as others see us" is not so corrective as might be supposed. Some persist in seeing us through the coloured spectacles of prejudice and ill-will, and this injustice is apt to create in us a further partiality to ourselves. If other men make mistakes about us who can see us, they probably do not make such great blunders about us as we do about ourselves, since we cannot see our own faces. Truth to tell, we are very fond of ourselves, and have our own characters in high esteem; therefore we are unfair judges on points of difficulty about ourselves. Our temptation is to gross self-flattery: we dream of strength where all is weakness, of wisdom where all is folly. A man does not need to see his own face: if that face be washed to purity, it will be enough that God sees it, and approves its beauty.

But I will tell you, further, why Moses did not see the glory of his own face. It was because *he had seen the glory of God.* When a man gets a clear view of the holiness of God, it is all over with all claim of personal excellence; from that day he abhors himself in dust and ashes. I might have thought myself pure; but how can I, when I find that the heavens are not clean in God's sight? I might have thought myself wise; but how can I, when I read that he charged his angels with folly? How can I speak of perfect purity as a thing of which I am possessed, after I have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts? A vision of God is the quietus of boasting. He that hath looked into the face of the sun is blinded to all other light.

Having given one sufficient reason, I am, perhaps, unwise to add

another; but yet it may be profitable to remember that Moses had not seen the shining of his own face because *it had never once entered his thoughts to wish that his face should shine.* That is true beauty of character which comes without being sought—I mean unconscious excellence, a character which commands an admiration which it has never desired. Are we not too apt to wish to be bright that others may see us? Have we not laboured to grow in grace that we might outgrow others? Does no man pray for success in his ministry, with a little squint of his eye towards an ambition to be thought "so useful"? Does no sister ever seek the salvation of her class, that she may be esteemed in the church as a remarkable soul-winner? Did you never pray for holiness, and really mean that you wished to be considered holy? Have you never prayed in public with great fervour, with a half-suppressed wish to be thought a special man of God? Would it not have greatly gratified you to hear men say, "What a prayer that was!"? Have you not even laboured to be humble, that you might rejoice in your humility? I am afraid it is so. We are always praying, "Lord, make my face to shine"; but Moses never had such a wish; and, therefore, when it did shine, he did not know it. He had not laid his plans for such an honour. Let us not set traps for personal reputation, or even glance a thought that way.

Another reason why he had not thought of it was, that *he was so much engaged in doing good to others.* He gave himself up for those stiff-necked Israelites; he actually lived for them, and offered himself before God to die for them. He carried the whole people in his bosom as a nurse carries her child. He fed his flock like a shepherd; and, like the Good Shepherd, he would have given his life for the sheep. Oh, the self-sacrifice of the man Moses! He never thought about his own face; for he was thinking about *their* faces. What would he have given if they had been capable of such nearness to God as he himself enjoyed! Oh, to be so absorbed in doing good, that we have not a thought or a care for our own personal repute! Then a man may do good in self-forgetfulness, and may find himself famous to his own amazement.

Once more, Moses could not very well have thought of his own face shining, for *he had no example of such a thing to suggest the idea.* Out of all those around him nobody else's face shone. When you live with men whose faces shine, then you enquire about yourself, for you naturally wish your face to shine like theirs. Aaron's face did not shine. Alas, poor Aaron! Nobody's face shone in all that camp, and so there was nothing to cause Moses to look for such a radiance on his own brow. Mr. Bunyan, in his beautiful picture of Christiana and Mercy and the children coming up from the bath, represents the opposite state of things, for he says, "When the women were thus adorned, they seemed to be a terror one to the other; for that they could not see that glory each one on herself which they could see in each other. Now, therefore, they began to esteem each other better than themselves. 'For you are fairer than I am,' said one. And 'You are more comely than I am,' said another. The children also stood amazed to see into what fashion they were brought." It is a great treat to see and admire the Christian virtues of our brethren in Christ: every

Christian delights to see his friends comely in all the graces of the Holy Spirit. Moses had but little to gratify him in that way, especially at the period when he came down from the mount and found Aaron weakly yielding to the people's sin. Even the choicest of the elders were far inferior to Moses, and therefore it was not suggested by his surroundings that his own face might shine.

It is well when men are not self-conscious. It is best, my beloved brethren, that our faces should shine to others, and not to ourselves. If you might know your own excelling, do not know it, for there is an ill savour about self-consciousness. To come forward and say, "I am perfectly holy," is babyish. It is like a child who cries, "See my new frock! Look at my pretty new frock!" I tremble to hear one say, "I have quite passed out of the conflict mentioned in the seventh of Romans. I have got this, and I have got that." I am reminded of Jehu, when he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord"; and yet Jehu was not right at heart before the Lord. There is not much to see when you wish men to see it. God save us from knowing too much about the shining of our own faces! May the light of his countenance fill the whole circle of our being, while we lie at his feet, mastered by a reverent awe of him!

IV. I must hasten on to another interesting point. WHY DID MOSES WEAR A VAIL? Having this brightness on his face, why did he hide it?

I answer, *in part the natural meekness of the man led him to do so.* He was forced into the position of leader; he never wished to be prominent, but the Lord put great pressure upon him in the desert, and drove him on to be as king in Jeshurun. He had no ambitions. Though made to be as God to Pharaoh, he never exalted himself in the Egyptian court. Among the Israelites he did not monopolize power; but he gladly yielded to the chosen elders a portion of his magisterial dignity. The man Moses was very meek; and so to hide the brightness of his face was a pleasure, and not a trial to him. Like many a lovely woman, he shrank from the public gaze. We shall do well to possess the grace of humility.

He veiled his face *in tender condescension to the people.* When they ran away from him, he called to them to know why they were afraid. "My lord, we fear that splendour on your brow." "Then, let me veil it," says he; "I would not terrify, but win." It was their fault that they could not bear the brightness: their fault: I say again, their *fault*, and yet he does not upbraid, nor stand upon his rights. He had compassion on their folly as well as on their weakness. It may happen that a gracious man may be so evidently right, that, when others are offended at him, the offence is to be greatly blamed; and yet he will do well to yield in anything which does not involve principle. There is a modest veiling of excellences which shows a brother to be still more excellent than his excellences which have proved him. Quench not the light of your sternest principle; but veil it with abounding love. He always sinks himself, this man Moses. The God-given glory of *his* face he does not slight, nor seek to abate; but so far as it would bring him honour from men, he puts it under a vail. That he may come closer to the people whom he loves, he is

content to hide his glory. Let us also seek to bless the people, and to keep in touch with them.

But, beloved, the chief reason lies elsewhere. Why did Moses veil his face? The answer is this: *it was a judicial symbol, setting forth the sentence of God upon the people.* The Lord, by this token, as good as said, "You are so rebellious, so given to your idolatries, so unwilling to see, that henceforth you shall not see the brightness of my glory in the dispensation of the law in which you live. Moses shall veil his face because the vail is upon your hearts." It is a dreadful thing when God gives men up to a judicial blindness, when he permits the vail which they have woven to abide over their minds, "that seeing they might not see; and hearing they might not understand." As I told you in the reading, the vail was literally on Moses' face, but spiritually it was on their hearts. Henceforth they were not to see because they had not wished to see. He that wilfully shuts his eyes will find that God takes away his sight. If thou refuse to understand, justice will make thee foolish. The shadow of destruction is insensibility. The eyes are blindfolded before the fatal volley is fired.

The practical warning I would earnestly apply. Do you not think we have a great many people around us—may we not belong to them ourselves?—whose foolish hearts are blinded so that the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ is veiled for them? Are not many suffering from veiled hearts? In your circle there is a rare man of God: you have heard of his faith: he walks with God: others have told you what beauties they see in his character. You cannot see anything particular in him; you, on the contrary, despise him, and avoid his company. He wears a vail for you. Here is the Bible. "O book, exquisite sweetness!" Your dear mother calls it beyond all things precious. Dear soul, how her face brightens when she tells you how she has been sustained by it in the day of trouble! You read it now and then; but you do not see anything remarkable in it, certainly nothing that charms you: the Book is veiled to you. Here is the glorious gospel of the blessed God. You have heard us say what a wonderful gospel it is. We have been overjoyed in describing it. You feel no enthusiasm. The gospel is veiled to you. You have heard a sermon on some grand doctrine. Believers are ready to leap for joy; but you are utterly indifferent. The truth is veiled to you. This is a sad omen of a lost estate. The vail is on your heart, and your soul is in darkness which may be felt. Am I not speaking the truth about many of you? O my friends, when you hear about Christ, and do not admire him, conclude that you must be blinded; when you hear the glorious gospel of the blessed God, and it does not charm you, conclude that the vail is on your hearts. Oh, that you would turn unto the Lord! For when you turn to God, the vail shall be taken away. Oh, that God the Holy Spirit would come and turn you by his almighty power! May he constrain you to seek the Lord to-day. Then shall the vail be taken away, and you shall see the beauty of the Lord Jesus in his salvation. Here is a little prayer for you: use it often—"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." The wondrous things are

in the law; may you behold them. The Holy Ghost must take the vail away, and remove the scales from your eyes, and then you will see, but not till then.

This is why Moses wore the vail—as a testimony that God had given them over to judicial blindness, because they refused to know his will. O Lord, deal not thus with this people!

V. I close with this question. WHAT OTHER LESSONS MAY WE LEARN FROM THE FACE OF MOSES?

First, learn *the exceeding glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.* How so? Well, this was, so to speak, in a minor degree, the transfiguration of Moses; and all it came to was that *his face* shone. But when Christ came, he was transfigured as to his whole person. Not only his face shone, but his whole person and his garments also. Moses could veil his face, but the shining of our Lord could not be thus veiled, for it streamed through his raiment, which became "white and glistering." The vail of Moses was, so to speak, a raiment for his face, and it was able to keep in the glory; but our Lord was wearing his usual garment without seam, woven from the top throughout, and the light shone through his raiment, so that he and his clothing were alike bright. Nothing could conceal the glory of our Lord, which was so great, that whereas Israel saw it tremblingly, the disciples were cast into a deep sleep thereby. A word is used by an instructive commentator in reference to Christ's transfiguration which expresses a forcible idea: he speaks of it as incandescence. He was all brightness and light; surpassing the mere shining of the skin, even as the sun far surpasses every form of its reflection. The glory of Christ is beyond all comparison—the glory which excelleth. Oh, that I knew how to speak of it! But I feel like Paul, when he said, "I could not see for the glory of that light." It overpowers me. The Lamb is the light of heaven itself; what shall I say more? John on the rock of Patmos saw our Lord in vision, and he said his "countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead." Moses wore a light on his face that might be covered; but Jesus was, and is, all light, and in him is no darkness at all. "That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Another lesson is just this. *See the possibilities of glory which await human nature.* If Moses' face can shine here, I can understand how, in the next state, when we are risen from the dead, our bodies may be all light and bright, and we ourselves like flames of fire. "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Unless our Well-beloved cometh quickly, our bodies will be sown in dishonour; and now I see how they can be raised in glory. Then shall we put on "the glory of the celestial." We shall be among the shining ones, and shall ourselves shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father. If the wrinkled face of the patriarch Moses, bronzed and browned by forty years in the Arabian desert, and lined by the long fast on the top of the mountain—if the dry parchment of his face could shine so marvellously, why should not our bodies be endowed with glory, when God shall raise them again from the grave? As a crocus bulb looks up from the soil wherein it was

buried, and boldly lifts up a golden cup, which the sun fills with glory from the heavens, why should not we also bloom into perfection? "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be"—any more than it did appear what Moses should be—"but we know that, when he shall appear,"—whose appearing is more glorious than that of Moses—"we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Lastly, here is one more lesson. *What honour God may put upon any one of us if we really put honour upon him!* My brothers, my sisters, if you are consecrated to God as Moses was, he can give you an unconscious influence which others will be compelled to recognize. Upon your brow the heavenly light of grace will rest; from your eyes the lamp of truth will shine. Walk in the light, as God is in the light, and have fellowship with him; and then you, too, shall shine as God's light-bearers, and your whole life shall be as the star which guided the wise men to Christ. Influencing men for God, the gracious will follow you, and the wicked will be awed by you, even as "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy."

O Spirit of God, rest on every one of us according to our capacity to endure the tongue of fire! Say unto us, O Saviour, this morning, "Go forth, my friends, and be burning and shining lights to my praise." Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus xxxiv. 28—35; 2 Corinthians iii., iv. 1—6.

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"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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BELIEVERS SENT BY CHRIST, AS CHRIST IS SENT BY THE FATHER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 11TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."—John xvii. 18.

HERE is a great fact mentioned, namely, that the Father sent the Son into the world. In this our Lord's disciples had believed. Jesus says himself, "They have believed that thou didst send me." It is one of the first essentials of saving faith to believe in Christ as the sent one of God. They had proved, in their own experience, that Jesus was sent of God; for they had found him to be sent to them. Especially they knew this, because they had found in him eternal life. To them it had been life eternal "to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he had sent." They had entered into the possession of a new and heavenly life, and they rejoiced therein; so that to them the fact that God had sent his Son into the world was indisputable. It was a fact upon which they based their salvation. It was their hope, their joy, their theme of thought, and subject of converse They declared it with the accent of assurance.

Our Lord based upon that fact another. He says to his Father, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." As surely as Christ was sent into the world by the Father, so surely are the saints sent into the world by Christ. Note well, that I say "the saints": I mean not the apostles only, but all the saints. I dare not limit the reference to what are called ordained ministers or apostles; for I believe it includes all the chosen of God. Was the prayer, contained in this seventeenth chapter of John, for the apostles only? I trow not. Surely our Lord prayed for all whom the Father had given to him, and not for ministers only. Beyond question, our great Intercessor pleaded for all those whom the Father gave to him; and hence it is of all these that he speaks in the words of our text. He mentions not only the officers, but the rank and file of the chosen host who have been called by grace to know him as the sent of God. He says to them all, without exception, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." I do not for a moment dispute the

need of a special call to the office of pastor or elder in the church of God, nor do I question that there are officers in the church of God upon whom peculiar responsibility rests; but no class of men may be exalted into a caste of Brahmins, who are alone sent into the world by the great Head of the church. We who spend our lives in teaching are your servants for Christ's sake; but we rejoice that you also have a high calling of God in Christ Jesus. If we have fuller knowledge of Scripture, or larger gift of utterance, accept us as your fellow-servants, whose talents are cheerfully employed for your sakes; but if you have not these same talents, yet you have others, and you are equally given to Christ, to be by him sent into the world.

This is no trifle, but a very solemn business. To our Lord it was a special matter of prayer. It is here in that prayer which always seems to me to be the core of the whole Bible. Our Lord pleads not only about our being saved, but about our being sent. There is something here which deserves our deepest thought.

There are two petitions in our Lord's prayer which bear upon this. First, comes the petition—"Holy Father, keep them." You cannot serve God unless he preserves you. You will never keep the Lord's flock unless he first shepherds you. The Lord of the vineyard must keep the keepers, or their vineyards will not be kept. The other prayer immediately precedes the text: "Sanctify them." You cannot go out into the world as the sent ones of Christ unless you are sanctified. God will use no unholy messenger; you must be consecrated and cleansed, devoted and dedicated to God alone, or else you will not have the first qualification for the divine mission. Christ's prayer is, "Sanctify them through thy truth." The more truth you believe, the more sanctified you will be. The operation of truth upon the mind is to separate a man from the world unto the service of God. Just in proportion as truth is given up, worldliness and frivolity are sure to prevail. A church which grows so enlightened as to neglect the doctrines of grace, also falls in love with the vain amusements of the world. It has been so in all past ages, and it is sadly so to-day. But a church which, in a living way, holds fast the truth once for all delivered to the saints, will also separate itself from the ways of the world: in fact, the world and the worldly church will shun it, and push it into the place of separation. The more separated we are, after our Master's fashion, the more fit shall we be to do his bidding.

Our Lord was evidently most careful as to our commission, which he bases upon his own commission, and declares to be as certain and real as his own sending by the Father. He so values this, that he prays, "Father, keep them," and "Father, sanctify them." May those two prayers be heard for us, and then we shall stand with our loins girt, our shoes on our feet, our lamps trimmed, and our lights burning, ready to go forth at the command of the Most High to the very ends of the earth. Our mission by Jesus grows out of his mission by the Father, and we may learn much about it by considering how the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

I. I would open up this subject by asking you, first, to CONSIDER WHAT OUR LORD'S BEING SENT INVOLVED TO HIMSELF; for, to a large extent, there will be a parallel between his being sent and ours. The

parallel is drawn by way of quality, not of equality. Christ's commission is on a higher scale than ours; for he was sent to be a propitiation and covenant-head, and so came into positions which it would be presumption for us to dream of occupying. Still, there is a likeness, though it be only that of a drop to the sea.

Our Lord's mission involved *complete subjection to the Father's will.* He said, "My Father is greater than I": this did not relate to his essential nature and dignity as God, but to the position which he took up in reference to the Father when he was sent to be our Saviour. He that sendeth is greater than he that is sent: the Saviour took up that subordinate position that he might do the Father's will. From that time forth, so long as he remained under his commission, he did not speak his own words, nor do his own deeds; but he listened to the Father's will, and what the Father said to him he both spoke and did. That is exactly where you and I have to place ourselves now, deliberately and unreservedly. Our Lord sends us, and we are to be, in very deed, subordinate to his command in all things. We are no longer masters; we have become servants. Our will is lost in the will of our glorious superior. If we are ambitious, and our ambition is guided by wisdom, it will take us down to that basin and the towel, and we shall be willing to wash the disciples' feet, to show that we are sent by our condescending Lord. We shall henceforth have no respect unto our own dignity or interest, but shall lay ourselves out to serve him to whom we belong. Whatsoever he saith unto us we shall aim to do. Although we are sons of God, yet now we are also servants; and we would not do our own will, but the will of him that sent us. Oh, to be sound on this point, so as to yield our members in perfect obedience, and even bring every thought into subjection to Christ! Oh, to die to self and live in Christ! Can you drink of this cup, and be baptized with this baptism? I trust you can; and, if so, you shall fulfil the errand upon which he sends you.

This meant for our Lord *the quitting of his rest.* He reigned in heaven, all angels paid him homage; but when the Father sent him, he left his high abode. He was laid in the manger, for there was no room for him in the inn. Where the horned oxen fed, there must the holy child be cradled. The royalties of heaven are left behind; the rest which he enjoyed in the bosom of the Father must be renounced for toil, and hunger, and thirst, and weariness, and the death of the cross. Dear friends, you may serve the Lord, and yet be as happy as your Lord was; but if Jesus has sent you into the world you are not to seek ease or comfort; you are not even to make your own spiritual comfort the first object of your thought. How nice that evening at home would be! But you are sent, and therefore must turn out to win souls. How delightful it would be to read that book through, and to leave the class alone! But you must not, for you are sent to instruct and save. Henceforth you are to consider nothing but how you can answer the design of him who has sent you. Your aim must be to do the utmost possible for your Lord. The Christian who does much is still an idler if he could do more. We have never reached the point of diligence till we are doing all that lieth in us, and are even then wishing to do far more. Bought with his precious

blood, the vows of the Lord are upon us, and we renounce our natural love of ease, that we may please him who has sent us.

When sent of God, the Saviour also had *to forego even heaven itself.* He was here on earth the God-man, the Mediator, and he did not return to the splendour of his Father's court till he could say, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, O Father, glorify thou me." We must not sigh for heaven while so much is to be done on earth. The rest of glory will come soon; but just now we have to do with the work of grace. Let us stick to our work here below, and do it thoroughly well, for our Lord has gone above, and is preparing a place for us. Is it not wonderful how God even now denies himself for the salvation of men? Why does not our Lord come at once in his glory? Why do we not see the millennial reign begin? It is because of the long-suffering of God: he waits and puts off the closing scene, because he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He keeps back even the glorious advent to give men space for salvation. That for which Jesus longs, and the Spirit longs, and the spouse longs, is kept back in mercy to the guilty. The Bridegroom postpones his marriage day that men may be brought to him by the divine longsuffering. If Jesus can do this, surely we may well wait out of compassion to our fellow-men. Even our hope of being for ever with the Lord may wait a while. So long as there is another sinner for us to rescue, we will remain in this land of our exile. That is what our Lord means: the Father has sent me from heaven, and kept me out of heaven, for the sake of men; and even so shall I detain you among the tents of Kedar for a while, that you may bring in my redeemed through the gospel.

The words of our text are, "As thou hast sent me *into the world*"; and this implies *affinity with men.* Our Lord was not sent to the edge of the world to look over the fence, and converse hopefully from a distance; but he was sent right into the world. He took on him human nature, and became bone of our bone. We read, "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him." He was a man among men. In this way Jesus has sent you, my brethren, into families, into offices, into establishments, into places where you labour for daily bread, amongst a company of ungodly men. Do not cry out because you have thus to mingle with them. Your Lord was sent into the world, not, I say, to the outskirts of it, nor to some elevated mountain, high above it, from which he might look down. He was sent into the world in an emphatic sense; and so are you sent, wisely sent, to tarry even among unconverted, infidel, and impure men, that you may do for Christ his great work, and make known his salvation.

He was sent into the world, and this involved *abiding in humiliation.* "The world knew him not": therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. You are not sent into the world to be honoured and pampered; nor even to receive your righteous due. If God aimed at your immediate glorification, he would take you to heaven; but he aims at your humiliation, that you may be like his Firstborn. You are to have fellowship with the Only-begotten in many ways; and among the rest, you are to be partakers of his sufferings.

Expect to be misunderstood, misrepresented, belied, ridiculed, and so forth; for so was the Sent of the Father. You are to look for evil treatment; for as the Father sent his Son into a world which was sure to treat him ill, so has he sent you into the same world, which will treat you in the same manner if you are like your Lord. Be not surprised at persecution; but look for it, and take it as part of the covenant entail; for as Ishmael mocked Isaac, so will the seed after the flesh persecute that which is born according to promise.

In a word, your being sent of Christ involves *unreserved dedication to his work*. When Christ came into the world, he did nothing but what his Father sent him to do. He had no secondary object of any sort. From the reservoir of his being, no little stream trickled away in waste, but the whole of it went to turn the great mill-wheel of his life. The whole current and force of his nature went in one way, working out one design. Now, as the Father sent Jesus, so has Jesus sent you, to be henceforth by occupation a Christian. You are to be consecrated wholly and alone to the one object for which Christ has set you apart. There may be other lawful objects; but these you render subsidiary to the one object of your life. You have but one eye, and that eye looks to your Lord. Henceforth you belong to Christ, body, soul, and spirit—from the morning light to the evening shade, and through the night-watches. There is not a hair of your head but what Jesus values; for he has put it down in the inventory—"the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Give him, then, every single power, however feeble; every part of your nature, however insignificant. Let your whole being be the Lord's; for "ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price." "This is a high standard," says one. My brethren, it is none too high; and it is sad that any should think it so. God help you to know that you are sent, and clearly to perceive what your mission involves. We, too, are missioned from above; we, too, are to have a hand in the saving of the world.

II. Secondly, having thus shown you the parallel so far, I now ask you to CONSIDER WHY OUR LORD WAS SENT INTO THE WORLD.

Our Lord came here with one design. Christ was not sent to teach a correct system of philosophy. He was not Plato, but Jesus; not a sage, but a Saviour. He could have solved the problems of the universe; but he did not even allude to them. He was not an Aristotle, ruling the world of human thought; although he could have done so easily had he chosen. Blessed be his name, he came to save from sin; and this no Plato or Aristotle could have done. All the sages and philosophers put together are not worth so much as the little finger of a Christ. Christ entered into no rivalry with the academy; he came on a very different errand. Neither was our Lord sent to be an inventor or a discoverer. All the discoveries that have been made in modern times could have been at once revealed by him; but that was not his object, and he kept scrupulously to his one design. He could have told us the secret of the Dark Continent; but he was not sent for that end. He could have anticipated all that we have slowly learned, and saved the world the long processes of experiment and observation; but this was not the object of his mission.

He did not come to be a conqueror. God gave us in him neither Alexander nor Cæsar: of such slaughterers the world has always had enough and to spare. He conquers evil, but not by the sword. Our Lord did not come even to be a politician, a reformer of governments, a rectifier of social economics. There came one to him, who said, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." You might have supposed that the Lord would have arbitrated in that case; but he did not do so, for he said, "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?" He kept to his one business, and we shall be wise to do the same. Point me to a single instance in which he interfered with the government of Pilate, or of Herod. Had he anything to say about the tyranny of Cæsar? When he takes Cæsar's penny in his hand, he simply says, "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." He was none of Cæsar's, for he belonged to God, and to God alone. Should not Christian people take heed that they follow Christ in this unity of aim and purpose? This I know, I am not sent to preach to you any new philosophical system, nor to advocate any political party, nor to meddle with any of those social matters which can be better managed by others. It is mine to preach the gospel of the grace of God; and this one thing I do. If you can serve Christ and your fellow-men in any way, do it; but never get away from your one aim and purpose. If we are enabled to save men's souls by the Holy Ghost resting upon our teaching we may die content, even though we have left fifty other excellent things undone. There are enough of the dead to bury the dead. Burying the dead is a good work; but this will be a labour more congenial to the dead around us than to ourselves: let us leave it to them. We cannot do everything: let us do that which we are sent to do. Oh, that every Christian would feel that, whatever else he would like to be, his first business is to be a servant of Christ. Your first concern is to serve Christ, and it ought to be your second thing to serve Christ. Then I would claim that it should be your third thing, and I shall get far on in numbers before I should allow any other character to take a leading position. May no possible object bear any comparison in your desires and endeavours in comparison with your resolve to glorify God your Saviour!

Notice, further, that *our Lord was not sent to be ministered unto, but to minister.* I fear that many of his professed servants think they have been sent to be ministered unto. Their religion consists in coming to places of worship to be ministered unto. Through the week they would like to have very particular attention from the pastor and the church officers, and you hear them grumbling that they are not sufficiently looked after. Surely, they must have been sent, not to minister, but to be ministered unto. Brethren, let us give them as much as we can of our services, for they evidently need them; but Jesus was not sent to be visited, and waited on, and served: he came to minister to others; and he did so to the full, and could truly say, "I am among you as he that serveth." Beloved friend, you know that it is more blessed to give than to receive; therefore feel it to be your joy to live as one who is sent by Jesus to be the servant of the church, and the winner of souls.

Let us enquire what was Christ's work upon earth. It was, first, *to teach*. Wherever he went he was an instructor of the ignorant. He preached of the kingdom, and of faith, and of grace. We are to teach. "I do not know anything," says one. Then do not tell it; but first go to the Lord and ask him to teach you something; and as soon as ever you know the A B C of the gospel, go and teach somebody that A B C. You need not teach him D E F and G H I till you have advanced so far yourself; but teach all you are taught. Learn first; but when you have learned, then let others learn from you. This is what Jesus did: be teaching the gospel everywhere.

Forget not that *he lived*, and his living was teaching. His actions were so many heads of his life-sermon. His every movement was instructive. He went about doing good. Make your life tally with your teaching; and make your life to be a part of your teaching; nay, the best part of your discourse. The most solid and most emphatic teaching that comes from you should be what you do rather than what you say: and Christ has sent you into the world for that end.

Our Lord came also *to suffer for the cause of truth and righteousness*. If you follow him closely, you must expect to suffer also. Do not cry out about it, as though some strange thing had happened unto you. Take joyfully the spoiling of your good name. If Christ has sent you forth like sheep in the midst of wolves, wonder not that the wolf gives you a bite or two: is it not his nature? Let the wolf howl, but do not trouble yourself about it; for what else should a wolf do? When pain, and weakness, and bodily infirmity seize on you, and you lie for days and weeks tossed with pain all through the sleepless nights, take it all patiently, and say, "I am sent to show patience, that men may see what grace can do."

You are sent *to save men*. It is true that you have not to redeem them by blood; *that* the Lord has done most effectually. You have not to suffer as a substitute; for his one sacrifice has sufficed; but you are sent to seek and to save that which was lost by proclaiming salvation by Christ Jesus. Every man who is saved himself should feel that he is called at once to labour for the salvation of others, Your election is not only election to personal salvation, but to personal service. You are chosen that, through your being saved, others may be called into the like felicity. View this very clearly, and get it fixed in your minds, and then carry it out in your daily lives.

"Ah!" say you, "our Lord might very well give himself up to his work; for if he had not done so, the whole world must have perished." Listen! *Your work also is indispensable*. How is the work of Christ to be made effectual among the sons of men for their salvation? Must they not hear it, that they may believe it? How shall they hear without a preacher? I venture to say that as the salvation of men depended upon Christ, so, in another sense, the salvation of men at this hour depends upon the church of God. If believers do not go and preach Christ, who will? If you that love him do not commend him, who will? Do you think that the Houses of Parliament will ever meet together to consider the evangelization of the heathen? If the Government did take such work in hand, it could do nothing, for it is not a fit agent, and it would hinder rather than help the good

design. Do you think the worldlings, the sceptics, the critics will ever unite to spread the kingdom of Christ, and save the souls of men? Do not dream it. If the church of God does not go forth on her holy errand, nothing will be done. "But it might be done by angels," says one. I know it might; but "unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." He has committed unto us the word of reconciliation, even to us who are men; and we must attend to it, or great guilt will lie upon us. I should like every Christian to feel that he has to be the instrument of salvation to certain persons. It is all allotted; the whole country is measured and divided, and we have each our portion, which we must conquer for our Lord. If I belong to the tribe of Judah, I have to help my brethren to drive out the Canaanites from our portion. If you belong to the tribe of Issachar, or Benjamin, you must look to your own allotment, and clear it of the enemy. Joshua is the leader, but every Israelite is in his army. Christ has power over all flesh, as the head of the body, and he has given to each of his members a portion of his power, so that each member of his body has power over some portion of the "all flesh," and that power must be used in the giving of eternal life to as many as the Father hath given to Jesus. God grant that you may feel this, and may go to your work as Christ went to his!

III. This leads me a little further, and I now invite you to CONSIDER HOW OUR LORD CAME; for this will show us how we ought to go forward when we are sent.

First, our Lord came *with alacrity*. The work of our Redeemer was no forced work. He was sent; but he willingly came.

> "Down from the shining seats above
> With joyful haste he fled."

"Lo, I come to do thy will, O God," said he. He came cheerfully among the sons of men. You that are sent of Christ must always go gladly to your service; never look as if you were driven to the field like oxen which love not the plough. God does not delight in a slavish spirit. If we serve Christ because of the yoke of duty, we shall serve badly; but when our service is our pleasure, when we thank God that to us is this grace given, that we should "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ," then we shall labour wisely, zealously, and acceptably.

Next, our Lord came *with authority*. The Lord God had sent him. He had the Father at his back. Be sure that, when Jesus sends you, you are invested with authority, and they that despise you do it at their peril. Your blunders and mistakes are not authorized; but so far as you speak his Word with a desire for his glory, he that receives you receives Christ, even as our Lord said, "He that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." God is with you, be not afraid; your Lord will not let your words fall to the ground.

Our Lord came *with ability*, too. What did his ability consist in? Mainly in this—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me." This is also where your sufficiency must be found; and you can have as much as you please of it. You cannot get every

faculty of the brain, but you can have every influence of the Spirit. It may be, you cannot reach the highest form of education or of utterance, but these things are not vital: God can speak by your stammering tongue, even as in the case of Moses. You shall do the Lord's work, and do it well, if you are anointed of the Holy Ghost. He who does Christ's work in Christ's power works an abiding work which will eternally glorify God. He who sends us out into the world to carry the gospel to every creature will give us grace to obey his bidding.

Our Lord came *with absorption*. Jesus came, as I have said before, to do what he was sent to do, and nothing else. He meddled with nothing beyond his vocation: every thought of his manhood, every power of his Godhead, he devoted to fulfilling the errand on which he came. His zeal had eaten him up. He was covered with it as with a cloak. The man Christ was all on fire, and all on fire with one desire, that he might finish the work which his Father had given him to do: for this joy he endured the cross, despising the shame.

Our Lord came *with abiding resolve* to go through with his mission to the end. He never thought of going back. He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. He pressed through shame, through death, to accomplish our redemption. In these days we shall not do much unless we have a desperate determination to persevere in the teeth of difficulties. Those who can go back will go back. Remember how Gideon proclaimed throughout the host, that if any man was faint-hearted he might go home; so do we proclaim to-day: go home if you are wavering. If you do not love Christ enough to be resolved to serve him to the last, what is the good of you? You will break down and lose us the victory at some important crisis. He that has been bought with the blood of Christ, and knows it, feels that he must endure to the end; for only he that endureth to the end shall be saved. We go because our Lord's sending constrains us. "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" Woe is unto you if you do not teach the children, or speak to individuals, or write letters, or in some way fulfil your mission!

IV. Bear with me a little, while I bid you CONSIDER HOW OUR LORD BEHAVED AS THE SENT ONE. Oh, that we may learn from him how to fulfil our own mission!

Our Lord *began early*. While he was yet a youth, he said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" As soon as ever a man is converted, he should enquire, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Young believer, do not let many weeks pass over your head before you have attempted somewhat for your Lord. I will correct that exhortation; I wish you would not let a single day pass away without your bearing testimony for your Master.

But, next, *our Lord waited very patiently*. He was thirty years old before he preached openly. We do not know all that he did in the workshop at Nazareth. Is it not possible that he supported his widowed mother by his hand-labour? We do not know; but of this we are sure, that it is the duty of many young men to look after their parents first. It is the duty of all to "show piety at home." Many Christian women will have done well if they have carried out home

duties. She was a holy woman upon whose grave they placed this epitaph, "She made home happy." This is what Jesus did for the first thirty years of his life. He was doing the Father's will when he was a young man at home. Though he did not preach, yet while he was working and learning, he was carrying out the purpose for which he was sent.

When the time came for him to commence his more public service, *he sought proper entrance* into it. He did not blunder into God's work by a rush and a leap; but he went to John to be baptized, and to be publicly recognized as the Messiah. John was the porter, and he opened the gate to the Good Shepherd, who came in by the door, and did not climb up some other way. He came to John, who represented the prophetic chair of the Jewish church, and so he entered into his work as minister in a lawful and proper way. I like our young friends, when they feel their time has come for public service, to begin in right style and due order, carrying out the Lord's mind in the Lord's way. Wilfulness in beginning may throw a man out of gear as to his future work; and it argues a spirit ill prepared for acceptable service.

That being passed, see *how he laboured at his work.* He was always doing the Father's will. He worked all the day, and every day, and everywhere, with everybody. Some Christian people can only render occasional service. They are very good at a Convention. They save up their holiness for meetings. At a religious gathering they are in fine form; but they are not every-day saints. The kind of person the church needs most is the maid-of-all-work, the worker who can turn his hand to anything which providence allots him, and is glad to do so, however humbling it may be. My venerated grandmother owned a set of choice china, which, I believe, is, part of it, in existence now. Why does it exist now? It has seen little service. It only came out on high-days and holidays—say once in six months, when ministers and friends came to tea. It was a very nice set of old china; too good for children to break. Some Christians are like that fine old ware: it would not do to use them too often. They are too good for every day. They do not teach their servants, and try to win the poor people in their own neighbourhood to Christ; but they talk well at a Conference. Oh, you fine bits of egg-shell china, I know you! Don't fear. I am not going to break you. Yet I would somewhat trouble you by the remark that in the case of such ware as you are, more pieces get broken in the cupboard than on the table. You will last all the longer if you get to work for Christ in everyday work. Jesus was not sent out for particular occasions, and neither are you. We use our Lord for a thousand hallowed purposes, and even so will he use us from time to time, if we are but ready and willing.

Notice about our Lord's service, that *his prayers always kept pace with his work.* This is where most of us fail. When our Lord had a long day's work, we find him taking a long night's prayer. "I have so much to do," says one, "that I could not be long in prayer." That is putting the case the wrong way upwards. When you have most to do, you have most need to pray; and unless you keep up the proportion, your offering will fail in quality. The holy incense was sweet before God, because in that sacred compound there was a proportion

of each spice; and so in our lives there must be a due measure of Word, and work, and prayer, and praise. I may say of prayer what one said of salt in the Scripture, "Salt without prescribing how much." Prayer can never be in excess. You can salt meat too much, but you cannot salt your service too much with prayer. If you are accustomed to pray in your walk and works, at all hours and seasons, you do not err. There never will be in any of us a superfluity of devotion. God help you to be like his Son, who, though he was sent, and had the Father with him, yet could not live without prayer. May you not only feel your need of prayer, but fill up that need abundantly!

Once more, in all that Jesus did *he remained in constant fellowship with the Father*. He said, "He that sent me is with me." That is a beautiful sentence. Let me repeat it—"He that sent me is with me." The great Father had never to call to Jesus and say, "Come nearer. You are departing from me. You are too busy with Mary and Lazarus and Peter and John, and so you are forgetting me." No, no. He did always the things that pleased God, and he was always in communion with the great Father in everything that he did. "Ah!" says one, "it is hard to commune with God, and be very busy." Yes, but it will prove harder still to have been very busy, and not to have dwelt with God. It is easy to do much when you walk with God: and easier still to make a great fuss and do nothing because the Lord is away. To get near omnipotence will not make you omnipotent, but it will make you feel omnipotence working with you. Oh, that we might thus dwell with God as Jesus did; for he has sent us for this, even as the Father sent him.

I would leave with you four words. We are sent; therefore, whenever we try to press Christ upon men *we are not guilty of intrusion*. We have sometimes known strangers asked in this place about their souls, by certain of our friends, and they have grown angry at such a question. This is very silly of them, is it not? But I hope the friend who meets with an angry answer will not be at all hurt. You are not intrusive; though the angry person says you are. You are sent, and where Jesus sends you you have a right to go. The postman frequently knocks at the door as late as ten o'clock. I suppose you want to be asleep. Do you cry out—"How dare you make that noise?" No, he is the postman, an officer of Her Majesty, and he is sent out with the last mail, and must deliver the letters. You cannot blame him for doing that for which he is sent. Go you and knock at the doors of the careless and the sleepy. Give them a startling word. Do not let them perish for want of a warning or an invitation. Go on without fear: your commission is your warrant: if Jesus has sent you, you have a right to speak even to princes and kings.

Next, we are sent; therefore, *we dare not run away*. If Jesus bids us go forward, we must not retreat. If what we have preached and taught be of God, if we are ridiculed for it, let us take no notice, but steam ahead. Put more coals in the furnace, get the steam up, and go faster than ever in the same course. We defy the devil to stop us, for we are sent.

Next, we are sent; therefore, *we are sure to be helped*. Our King never sends a servant on an errand at his own charges. *Our* own

power fails us, but he never allows *his* power to fail us when engaged in his service. Those who are sent shall be sustained.

But, if we are sent, remember lastly, *we have to give in an account.* Our Lord does not call for the time-sheet every night; but a time-sheet is kept all the same, and there will be a day for passing in the checks, and we shall have to answer for what we have done. I speak not now to you ungodly ones, whose account will be terrible at that last great day. God save you! May you believe on him whom God hath sent! But now I speak to Christian people: you will have to render in your account, and may God grant you may not have to make a lamentable return in this fashion—"On such a day so much wood, and on such a day so much hay, and on such a day so much stubble." Let there be down in your book nothing but gold, silver, and precious stones; for it must all be tried with fire, and if you yourself are saved, if your work is burned up you will suffer loss. What pain to find your life-work to be a lot of wood, and hay, and stubble, which will blaze furiously, and die out in ashes! You know what I mean: so much time spent in planning frivolous amusements for the people, so much talent expended in teaching what is not the gospel, so much zeal consumed upon matters which do not concern eternal things, all this will burn. Beloved, do your Master's work, win souls, preach Christ, expound your Bibles, pray men to be reconciled to God, plead with men to come to Christ. This kind of work will stand the fire; and when the last great day shall dawn, this will remain to glory and honour. God bless you, brethren, for Christ's sake!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xvii.

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SCRIPTURAL SALVATION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 18TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."—Romans x. 11.

THE shepherd on the hill is most of all anxious about his sheep: he cares for his cottage, he trains the woodbine around his porch, sows flowers before his door, and digs his little plot of garden ground; but, since he is a shepherd, his chief thought follows his flock, and especially any of the sheep that are wandering, or the lambs that are tender. Even so I feel that my main business is the saving of souls. I may fitly preach to you upon any scriptural subject, and I may minister to the delight of the family of the redeemed, and lead them into the deep things of God; but my principal business must always be watching for souls. This one thing I do.

When a city is to be stored for a siege, it will be well for those who attend to the commissariat to lay in a proportion of everything that is necessary for human comfort, and even a measure of certain luxuries; but it will be of first importance to bring in great quantities of corn. The necessaries of life must be the chief provision. These we place in store-houses by tons, whereas in other articles pounds may suffice: if there be a failure of bread, what will the people do? For this reason, I feel I must preach over and over again the plain gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. While I would withhold nothing that may minister to edification, to comfort, to growth, or to the perfecting of the saints; yet, first and foremost in abundance, even to overflowing, I must gather for you the bread of life, and set forth Christ crucified as the sinner's only hope. Faith must be urged upon you; for without it there is no salvation. Paul, in this case, was acting upon this safe principle, as he always did; for he is speaking of salvation in the plainest terms. His heart's desire and prayer for Israel was, that they might be saved, and he proved the truth of that desire by setting forth that which would save them: he keeps to faith in Christ, and hammers upon that nail to fasten it surely.

I. I shall begin my sermon this morning by reminding you that, HERE IS AN OLD-FASHIONED WAY OF PROOF: "The Scripture saith."

In this enlightened age little is made of Scripture; the tendency is to undermine men's faith in the Bible, and persuade them to rest on something else. It is not so with us, as it certainly was not so with Paul. He enforced and substantiated his teaching by declaring, "The Scripture saith."

In this he follows the manner of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Though quite able to speak of himself, our Lord continually referred to Holy Scripture. His first public sermon was founded upon the Book of the prophet Isaiah. All along to the very end he was always quoting the Old Testament. So did his apostles. One is struck with their continual reference to Moses and the prophets. While they set the truth in a fresh light, they fell back continually upon the old revelation. "As saith the Scripture," "According to the Scriptures"—these are phrases constantly repeated. Paul declared that he spent his life "witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come."

Evidently *they regarded the statements of Scripture as conclusive.* They took counsel of the Scriptures, and so they ended the matter. "It is written," was to them proof positive and indisputable. "Thus saith the Lord," was the final word: enough for their mind and heart, enough for their conscience and understanding. To go behind Scripture did not occur to the first teachers of our faith: they heard the Oracle of divine testimony, and bowed their heads in reverence. So it ought to be with us: we have erred from the faith, and we shall pierce ourselves through with many sorrows, unless we feel that if the Scripture saith it, it is even so. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and therefore they spake not erroneously, nor even dubiously.

In the passage before us we have an instance of *inspiration endorsing inspiration, and building thereon.* Paul wrote by the direction of the Holy Spirit; he was himself a fully inspired man, and he had no lack of original speech; yet he falls back upon the Scripture. He calls the Old Testament to bear witness to the doctrine of the New, and in the same act expresses the agreement of the New with the Old. How far have they diverged from the Christian spirit, who begin to question the authenticity and authority of the books of Moses and the prophets! Brethren, had Paul been without inspiration, he was so great a saint and so eminent a confessor, that his reverence for the Old Testament would have been a lesson to us; but since we believe this epistle to have been inspired of the Holy Ghost, we are bound, as by divine law, to treat the ancient Scriptures as the great apostle treated them, namely, with absolute deference, regarding them as the sure Word of the Lord. To us it matters not what critics may say to shake faith in Holy Writ; their efforts will be all in vain if we are intimate with the Author of these books, and by his Holy Spirit possess a personal sense of his truth, his wisdom, and his faithfulness. After God has spoken, it little concerns us what the wise men of the world may have to say. They have always spoken against the Word of the Lord; but they have always spoken in vain, and so will they speak, even to the world's end.

Paul, in saying here, "For the Scripture saith," is referring, I think,

to the general sense of Scripture, rather than to any one passage. There are several texts from which it may be gathered that believers shall not be put to shame; such as, "They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed." But if the apostle is referring to any one passage of the Old Testament, he is not quoting it verbatim, but he is expounding it, and giving its general sense. Assuming that he refers to Isaiah xxviii. 16, I am glad of the lesson which he affords us in a kind of instructive criticism. When the Spirit of God himself deals with inspired Scripture, we can gather from his example how we may deal with it. It is best as far as possible to quote the very words of Scripture, lest we should err; but we have here a permit to quote the clear and evident sense, and we are allowed to regard that sense as equally authoritative with the exact words. Paul quotes, if he quotes at all, from the Septuagint translation rather than from the Hebrew, thus sanctioning a translation. Let us read the words in Isaiah xxviii. 16. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." You see at once the difference between the text as Paul gives it to us, and the original Hebrew.

Observe, first, that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, *Paul reads the passage in its largest sense.* The original text is, "He that believeth"; but Paul makes it, "Whosoever believeth." That is the true meaning. "He that believeth," means any "he" that believeth; and to make this fact clear, Paul says, "Whosoever believeth." We ought to take the promises of Holy Scripture in their widest possible application. When we meet with a passage distinctly referring to one person only, we are allowed to remember that no Scripture is exhausted by one fulfilment. You, being like that person, and in similar circumstances to him, may quote the promise as made to you; for it is intended for the whole class of persons of whom that one person is the representative. "He that believeth," is in Paul's judgment, nay, in the judgment of the Holy Ghost, tantamount to "Whosoever believeth." A promise made by man will legally be interpreted in its narrowest sense; but a promise made by God may always be taken in its major sense, since God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and his ways than our ways. Everything it will honestly bear you may pile upon the back of a divine promise. God loves to see faith taking him at his word, and he will do for it exceeding abundantly above what we ask or even think.

Next, note that *Paul reads the verse with the context.* In the Hebrew it is, "He that believeth"; but Paul reads it, "Whosoever believeth *on him.*" Did he do right to supply the "on him"? Certainly, since he thus gives the sense of the quotation as it stands in the prophet. I said before that Paul is not quoting *verbatim et literatim,* he aims at giving the sense of the passage; and, therefore, paraphrases it so as to remind you of its connection. "On him" is necessary to a perfect quotation of the passage as it stands. Let us read again: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth"—evidently it is, "He that believeth" in this foundation "shall not make haste." That

foundation is not "it," but "Him"; for it refers to Christ. Expressions separated from that which comes before them, and follows after them, may not express the writer's mind; and, therefore, when we quote from Holy Scripture we should endeavour not merely to give the words which are actually in the text, but to add such words as duly set forth the context. This lesson is worth learning.

Once more, *the apostle gives us the true and plain meaning* of the text. He leaves the figure which was suitable for Isaiah, but might have been misunderstood by the Romans, and he gives the sense intended by Isaiah in plainer language. The prophet said, "He that believeth shall not make haste." That "making haste," means being fluttered and alarmed, and so being led to run from the foundation. Such a person fled in haste because he was ashamed of his hope. Paul puts aside the drapery of the metaphor to let the uncovered sense stand out boldly. He expounds the Scripture under infallible guidance, and gives its meaning to us in this form, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

The true sense of the passage our apostle uses by way of argument: he enforces the promise of the gospel by the teaching of the prophet. Dear friend, when you go to win souls, go with a clear understanding of the Scriptures, and then quote those Scriptures frequently, if you would have power over the minds of men. Do not think to convince sinners by your own fine phrases, but use the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. If you want to bring souls to faith in Christ, remember that faith is begotten by the Word; for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The more of the true sense of the Word of God we can compress into our exhortations, the more likely shall we be to succeed in our gracious design. This is Paul's mode of argument, "the Scripture saith"; and we know no better.

II. And now, secondly, we have before us A SIMPLE STATEMENT OF THE WAY OF SALVATION: "The Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." The way of salvation is to believe on Christ, whom God has laid in Zion for a foundation.

What is believing on him? It is *trusting in him.* The language is not "Believe him,"—such belief is a part of faith, but not the whole. We believe everything which the Lord Jesus has taught, but we must go a step further, and trust him. It is not even enough to believe in him, as being the Son of God, and the anointed of the Lord; but we must believe *on* him, just as in the building (for that is the figure used by Isaiah) the builder takes his stone and lays it *on* the foundation. There it rests with all its weight, there it abides. The faith that saves is not believing certain truths, nor even believing that Jesus is a Saviour; but it is resting *on* him, depending *on* him, lying with all your weight on Christ as the foundation of your hope. Believe that he can save you; believe that he will save you; at any rate leave the whole matter of your salvation with him in unquestioning confidence. Depend upon him without fear as to your present and eternal salvation. This is the faith which saves the soul.

Notice, next, that this faith is *believing on a Person:* "He that believeth on"—*it?* No! On "HIM." Our faith is not based on a doctrine, or a ceremony, or an experience; but on "Him!" Our Lord

Jesus Christ is God; he is also man: he is the appointed and anointed Saviour. In his death, he is the propitiation for sin; in his resurrection, he is the justification of his people; and in his intercession, he is the eternal guarantee of their preservation. Believe "*on him*." Our faith fixes herself upon the Person of the Lord Jesus as seen in his sufferings, his offices, and his achievements. "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

The text refers to *the truth of the trusting*. The apostle does not say, "Whosoever believeth on him with full assurance, or with a high degree of confidence, shall not be ashamed." No; it is not the *measure* of our faith, but the *sincerity* of our faith which is the great question. If we believe on him at all, we shall not be ashamed. Our faith may be very trembling, and this will cause us sorrow; but a trembling faith will save. The greater your faith, the more comfortable for you; but if your faith is small as a grain of mustard-seed, it will save you. If your faith can only touch the hem of the Saviour's garment behind him, it will heal your soul; for "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Is there not blessed comfort about this assurance?

Observe, again, that all depends upon *the presence of this trusting*, and not upon the age of it. "He that believeth on him": this relates to the immediate present. Perhaps the truster has only believed on Jesus during the last five minutes. Very well, he does believe on him, and he shall not be ashamed. Some of us are glad to remember that we were built on the sure foundation more than forty years ago. But the length of years during which we have believed does not enter into the essence of the matter: believers are saved whether their faith has lasted through half a century or half an hour. "Whosoever believeth on him," takes in the convert of this morning as well as the hero of a thousand fights. My newly-believing friend, I am sorry you have put off faith so long; but, still, I am greatly glad that you have believed at all; for your faith shall not be put to shame.

One other remark needs to be made before I leave this point. Note *the soleness of the object of faith*. "Whosoever believeth *on him*." Nothing else is mentioned in connection with the Lord Jesus, who is the sole foundation. It is not written, "He that believeth on Jesus nine parts out of ten, and on himself for the other tenth." No! "Whosoever believeth *on him*"—on him alone. Jesus will never be a part Saviour. We must not rest in part upon what we hope to do in the future, nor in part upon the efficacy of an outward ceremony. No! The faith must be "*on him*." Both feet must be on the Rock of Ages. The whole stone must rest on the foundation. Take Christ to be the sole Saviour of your soul. I saw written at the foot of a Cross in France, "SPES UNICA"—Jesus is the lone hope of men. There is but one star in your sky, sinner, and that star is the Star of Bethlehem! There is but one light for the tempest-tost mariner on the stormy sea of conviction of sin, and that light is the Pharos of the Cross. Look there! Look there! Only there; "For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

Now if any soul here perishes, it will not be my fault. However feebly I may preach this morning, I shall go home satisfied that I

have set before you enough for your salvation, if you be willing and obedient. I have most plainly set before you the way of salvation. What more can I do? I can bring the horse to water, but I cannot make him drink; I can set the water of life before you, but I can do no more if you turn away from it. If you accept of the Lord Jesus and believe on him, you shall not be ashamed; but if you put him far from you, you will die in your sins, and your blood will be upon your own heads.

III. So I pass on to the third point: THE GLORIOUS PROMISE TO THOSE WHO OBEY THE GOSPEL. "The Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him *shall not be ashamed.*"

Take the Hebrew form of it first: "*shall not make haste.*" When a man builds his hope upon the Lord Christ, he is not driven into worry and hurry. He quietly walks with God, and does not haste through fear. They say that the floods are out, that the winds are howling, that the rains are descending: he that trusts in a refuge of lies may well make haste to flee; but he that has built his house upon the rock, quietly answers, "The flood is coming; I supposed it would. The rains are falling; I expected that they would. The winds are blowing; I was forewarned of the tempest, and I am prepared for it by being on the rock!" His house will stand. He will never be ashamed of its foundation. In patience he possesses his soul.

"Calm 'mid the bewildering cry;
Confident of victory."

The Holy Spirit's reading of the Holy Spirit's Word in the Old Testament is, "He shall not be ashamed," and this means that *he shall not be ashamed at any time by discovering that he has been deluded.* Men are ashamed when their hopes fail. If a man has an expectation of eternal life, and on a sudden he sees his hope dashed to shivers, is he not ashamed? If on his dying bed his confidence should turn out to be based on a falsehood, how ashamed he will be! He will then say, "I am ashamed to think I did not take more care. I am ashamed that I followed my own judgment instead of God's Word." They shall lie down in sorrow who find their hope to be as a spider's web. It will be a awful thing in our last moments, when we most need comfort, to be driven to despair by the wreck of our confidence. If any of you are trusting in your gold, it will turn out to be a poor confidence when you are called upon to leave all earthly things. I have heard of one who, on his death-bed, laid bags of money to his heart; but he was forced to lay them away, and cry, "These will not do! These will not do!" It will be a sorry business if we have been trusting in our good temper, our charity, our patriotism, our courage, or our honesty, and when we come to die shall be made to feel that these cannot satisfy the claims of divine justice, or give us a passport to the skies. How sad to see robes turn to rags, and comeliness into corruption! How wretched to regard one's self as covered with a garment fit for Christ's great wedding-feast, and then to wake out of a dream and find one's self naked? You will never have this vexation of spirit if you take Christ Jesus to be your confidence. So far from being ashamed, you will boast in the crucified

Saviour; yea, you will vow with Paul, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Furthermore, dear friends, he that believes on Christ *shall not be ashamed to own his faith.* This is a sharp saying, and it cuts as a razor. I wish it would make a great gash in cowardly spirits. "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Some think they believe on Christ, and yet they are ashamed to own their faith in the Lord's appointed way; or, indeed, in any way. If they are in ungodly company, they do with their faith as they do with their dog when a friend comes in: they say, "Lie down, sir." Because it is inconvenient to be known to be a believer, they treat the Lord Christ as they would treat a dog. Some of you have never made a confession of your Lord: what will become of you? "Oh," say you, "do not say hard things!" I do not say them out of my own head: let me read the passage to you from verse ten: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." What is the meaning of the whole passage? I cannot shut my eyes to the truth, that it speaks of confessing Christ, and declares that he who really believes on him will not be ashamed of it. If you, my hearer, are ashamed of your Lord, your faith is not real; or, to say the least of it, you have cause to suspect that it is not. If you are ashamed, you are an unbeliever; for, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." The Christian's song is—

> "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
> Or to defend his cause;
> Maintain the honour of his Word,
> The glory of his cross."

For my own part, I have often said, and I cannot help repeating it yet again—

> "E'er since by faith I saw the stream
> His flowing wounds supply,
> Redeeming love has been my theme,
> And shall be till I die."

I am not ashamed of my hope; I love to state it, to glory in it, and to make it widely known. I heard of a "modern-thought" minister of some repute, that a person asked him, "Sir, what is your theory of the atonement?" He replied, "My dear sir, I have never told *that* to any living person, although I have been a preacher for years, and I am not going to commit myself now." He seemed to think that this was rather a wise thing. My course runs in the opposite direction: I believe in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, and I am not ashamed of the old-fashioned doctrine. "He loved me, and gave himself for me"; why should I be ashamed to own it? I will not believe anything that I dare not preach. I have a grave suspicion that it will go ill at last with the man who has one faith for the public and another for himself. We should be ashamed at being ashamed of Christ and his truth.

Still, this is not all the meaning of our text: *the believer shall have no cause to be ashamed.* Let me try to illustrate this assertion.

We shall not be ashamed because our faith is proved to be unreasonable. When a man is convicted of believing an absurdity, he is ashamed. But there is nothing unreasonable in the truth that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I will not say that reason teaches this grand fact; for reason could not reach so high. This truth is above reason, but it is not contrary to reason. When you get some idea of the infinite goodness and justice of God, it will not seem unreasonable that he should be willing to forgive sinners, nor unreasonable that he should devise a way by which he can do this without injury to his moral government. There is a sweet reasonableness in the provision of a Substitute for guilty men, and a still sweeter reasonableness in the salvation of those who believe in the Lamb of God. In fact, the gospel system is so blessedly reasonable, that when it comes home to the enlightened understanding it carries the mind by storm. I have seen love at first sight with many a man who, for the first time, has heard how God is "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." It has seemed so Godlike a method, that the man has accepted it at once: it bore its proof in its face.

Next, we are not ashamed because our faith has been disproved; for it has never been disproved. No man has been able to prove that the Son of God was not here on earth, and that he did not die on the Cross, the "just for the unjust, to bring us to God." The resurrection has never been disproved, nor the ascension, nor the descent of the Holy Ghost. Nothing has overthrown apostolic testimony. To cavil at a statement is not to disprove it. To make it a matter of coarse jest is not to disprove it. The apostles and their companions bore public witness; and died because of their solemn conviction of the truth of their testimony. They were simple men, who could not have invented the gospel story if they would; and they were good men, who would not have invented it if they could. Until men can prove that there was no Christ, and no propitiation for sin, we shall not be ashamed to believe on him.

We shall never be ashamed of believing on Jesus, because by experience we shall find it to be unsatisfactory to our conscience. No, no. We are more than content with the ground of our trust in this respect. Well do I remember when I first gripped the thought that Jesus suffered in my place and stead, and that I, looking to him, was saved. I felt a peace like a river, ever flowing, ever deepening, ever widening. My former trouble had arisen from the question—how could God, as a righteous judge, pass by my violation of his holy law? Sin is not to be viewed as a personal offence to God, as a Being, but a rebellion against his laws as the Judge of all the earth, who must do right. How could he wink at sin? How could he treat the guilty as the innocent? When I saw that he did not wink at sin, but that Jesus came to vindicate the divine law by suffering in our place, I rested with all confidence on that blessed fact. My heart said, "It is enough," and to-day it cries, "It is enough." My conscience has never raised a question about the security furnished by the ransom of the Lord Jesus. My heart remains perfectly at ease now

she knows that "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." If the nature of God had not required an atonement for sin, the conscience of the sinner might have needed it. The righteous apprehension of conscience as to wrath to come demands a vindication of the law. Because we have this vindication in Christ we are not ashamed.

We are not ashamed of the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ because it proves inoperative upon our lives. I remember the witty Sidney Smith, who by mistake figured as a clergyman, managed to come into collision with the Methodists, and he charged them with so much preaching faith that good works were at a discount. Surely he never heard Mr. Wesley. I venture to say that the Methodists produced more good works than Mr. Smith's preaching ever did. If any say to us, "This faith of yours takes you off from trusting in works"; we answer, "It does; but it does not take us off from practising them." Faith is the mother of holiness and the nurse of virtue. The lives of the Puritans who taught the gospel of faith in Christ were infinitely preferable to the lives of those Cavaliers who believed in human merit. The fact is, that men who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have even been ridiculed for being righteous over much, and rated for a sort of moroseness of morality; but history has never afforded the least support to the charge that they were indifferent to morality. Indifferent to morality? We never knew what holiness was until we believed in Jesus. We had no aspirations after purity till we were saved by him. The spiritual effect of faith in Jesus is of the noblest. Oh, that we could display more of it!

We are not ashamed to challenge investigation as to the philanthropic effect of faith in the gospel. If anyone should sneer, and say, "You believers think yourselves saved, and so you are comfortably unconcerned as to what becomes of others." I should answer, "What a lie!" We love the souls of men, and we have proved it in our ministry, and in our incessant efforts to save them. We have gone with breaking heart and bowed head because certain of our hearers remain in unbelief. I can appeal to you all, that my ministry has been full of earnest expostulations, affectionate appeals, and tearful entreaties. God is our witness how truly we can say, our heart's desire and prayer to God for others is, that they may be saved. We are not ashamed to say that the ministry of those who believe alone in Christ, and who know assuredly that they are saved by grace, has about it, as a rule, a greater power to win souls than the ministry of those who preach other gospels. We say no more, lest we become fools in glorying. We are not ashamed of our hope on this ground.

We are never ashamed of it, again, as to its operation upon others. When I look back through my life, having preached nothing in this place but faith in Christ as the way of salvation, I can, without any effort of memory, remember many drunkards made sober, harlots made chaste, lovers of pleasure made lovers of God. Many have been reclaimed from among the poorest and most degraded, and some from the rich and vicious. We have seen what faith in God has done by lifting them from the level of selfishness to the heights of grace. If we had to go down into the worst slum of London we would not wish

for anything better to preach than Christ crucified; and if we had to visit the gayest hells of the West End, we would not wish for any theme more powerful than the Cross of our Lord Jesus. "Believe and live" is still a charm most potent. We have no cause to be ashamed of what the truth of God has done in ages past, and is doing even at this day.

I will tell you when we should be ashamed of our hope, and that would be if we saw it repudiated by dying saints. It is all very well to be a believer when you are young, and in health, and can go about your business; but how will it fare with men and women, when they are called to go upstairs and suffer, and never to come down again till carried to their long home? How does the gospel serve them when they know that they cannot live another week? What is the condition of believers on the brink of the grave? Those who believe in Jesus are calm and happy; frequently they are exultant, and the bed can scarcely hold them because of their supreme joy in the prospect of being with their Lord. I am not telling you idle tales, brothers and sisters. Many of you know that I speak the truth; for it is of your own relatives that I am speaking now. Our people die well. We have no occasion to be ashamed. Tested by the dying of our fellow-believers, we are not ashamed of the gospel.

We might be ashamed, once more, if we could be outbidden in our prospects by some other system. What form of religion offers more to the believer than the system of grace and simple faith in Jesus? Nowhere in the world, that I know of, is there any other system of religion which promises sure salvation to its followers. The Roman Catholic system does not at all provide for present and everlasting salvation. What does it provide for? For your getting out of purgatory in due time, and no more. When I was in the Church of St. John Lateran, at Rome, I read a request for prayer for the repose of the soul of his Eminence, Cardinal Wiseman. Now Cardinal Wiseman was a great man, a prince of the church, but yet he is somewhere in the other world, where he is not in repose: so this request indicates. There must be a very poor outlook for an ordinary Catholic. For my part I would give up so cheerless a hope, and become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and go to heaven. "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." When the best Catholic finds himself in purgatory he will be ashamed, and will say, "Oh, that I had taken to the way of trust in the all-sufficient merit of the Lord Jesus; for then I should have been covered with his righteousness, and should have been with him where he is." Beloved friends, our rivals do not outbid us. Our gospel brings immediate pardon for every sin, a gracious change of nature, the regeneration of the heart, and the preservation of the soul to Christ's eternal kingdom and glory. Hallelujah!

IV. I have done, when I say to you, lastly, that in my text we see A WIDE DOOR OF HOPE FOR THE SEEKER. Read that word, "whosoever," whosoever, whosoever. I must keep on ringing that silver bell. It rings in the thirteenth verse—"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." It rings in the text—"Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

No secret decree has ever been made to shut out any soul that believeth on him. God has not spoken in secret in a dark place of the earth, and said, "Such a man may believe in Christ, and yet he shall be lost." Do not be afraid of this; for it is impossible.

No measure of sin in your past life can deprive you of this promise. "Whosoever believeth on him," though he had been a murderer, or a thief, or a drunkard, or an adulterer, or a liar, or a blasphemer, shall find his faith removing his sins through the blood of Jesus, and renewing his heart by the Holy Spirit. "*Whosoever* believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Says one, "I shall always be ashamed that I have so greatly transgressed." Yes, I know; but still you shall be so perfectly pardoned that your sin shall be blotted out, and you shall not remember the shame of your youth.

"But I do not feel as I ought," says one. You shall feel aright if you will believe on him. You shall not be shut out of the promise through any want of sensitiveness. It is not said, "Whosoever believeth on him and is sensitive to a high degree shall be saved." No: "Whosoever believeth on him." You ought to be sensitive, you ought to be tender, you ought to be grieved for sin, and you shall be if you believe on him. If you believe on Jesus, he will give you true repentance and deep self-abhorrence; but you must come to Jesus for these things, and not try to find them in your own depraved hearts. Nothing limits this "whosoever": "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

"Alas," cries one, "I have a strong besetting sin, I have a hot temper, or fierce lusts, or a desperate thirst for drink." Yes, I know; but if you believe on him you shall not be ashamed; for these shall be conquered and destroyed. You shall be helped to fight against them until you get a complete victory, and so you shall never be ashamed.

"Ah," says one, "but I once made a profession, and I have gone back." Yes; but, "whosoever" does not shut out the wanderer. Backsliding is a great and bitter evil, but he that believeth is justified from every sin. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Come, then, with your heaped up sins and be unburdened. Come, though seven devils dwell within you: come to have them driven out, and yourself made white in the blood of the Lamb. Come, for you shall not be ashamed. Let no man stand back and say, "I dare not come." Remember, the word of the Saviour, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "In no wise," that is, for no possible reason. "Oh, but my birth was shameful." I may be speaking to one who is illegitimate. This is no barrier; for children of shame may be made heirs of glory. The Lord rejects none, however uneducated, coarse, or dull they may be. Neither does race offer hindrance. Be you an Englishman or a Chinaman, there is no difference. White, black, brown, red, or blue, still does the promise stand, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." There is no distinction as to rank, name, class, or reputation. "Oh, but look at my profession." I am sorry if it is an ill profession: get out of it, and do something honest; but whatever you may be by trade, come

to Jesus and believe on him; for, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." "Alas, I am too old!" says another. What are you? Two hundred? "No, not so old as that." Then, you are under age as yet. Never mind how old you are; "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." If you have one foot in the grave, faith may put both feet on the Rock of Ages. You are yet on praying ground and pleading terms with God, therefore come to Jesus; for he hath said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Come with your little faith, and your trembling hope, and believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall not be ashamed.

Lastly, in that day when the earth and heaven shall melt, and nothing shall be seen but Christ upon the throne, judging all the earth, *those who have not believed in him will be ashamed.* They will have no excuse to offer: they have none even now. They will then be ashamed that they did not take the counsel of their godly friends, and heed the pleadings of their minister. They will be ashamed to think how they put off thoughts of Christ, and lingered until they found themselves in hell. The face of the Lord Jesus will be terrible to unbelievers to the last degree. One young person, in great trouble of soul, said to me the other day, "When I am lost, I shall always see your face; it will accuse and condemn me." She will not be lost. Dear girl, I trust she will soon find peace with God through Jesus Christ. It will be terrible to those who refuse the gospel even to remember the preacher of it; but infinitely more so to see the face of him who bled and died, and loved unto the uttermost. Oh, to think, "I would not have him! I would not be saved by him! I preferred to trust to myself, or not to think at all, and now here I am." Assuredly, the flames of hell will be more tolerable than a sight of his face. The bitterest wail of Tophet is this—"Hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne!" Ye sinners, seek his face, whose wrath ye cannot bear. God help you to seek it now. Before you leave this house may you seek it and find it. He saith, "Seek ye my face." May God the Holy Spirit lead you to obey the call. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans x.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—907, 118, 531.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

JOY, JOY FOR EVER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 25TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee."—Psalm v. 11.

"THE Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." There is an ancient difference which he has made in his eternal purpose; and this is seen in every item of the covenant of grace. "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself"; but it is also written, "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity." You that have believed are of the house of Israel, and heirs according to promise; for they that are of faith are the true seed of faithful Abraham. See that ye make manifest this difference by the holiness of your lives. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." Evermore display this difference by the joyfulness of your spirits. Let not noisome cares invade you; for we read, "I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there." Fear not that the wrathful judgment of God will fall indiscriminately; for we read, "Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail." The servants of the Lord should wear the royal livery: that livery is made of the fine cloth of holiness, trimmed with the lace of joy. Take care that you exhibit both holiness of character and joyfulness of spirit; for where these two things are in us, and abound, they make us that we be not barren nor unfruitful. To us there should be joy, strikingly to contrast with the unrest of the unbeliever. Over all the land of Egypt there was darkness which might be felt, even thick darkness, for three days: "They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings." If it be so with you, that the Lord has given you the light of joy, let your faces shine with it. If you walk in the light as God is in the light, go forth and let men see the brightness of your countenances, and take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus, and have learned of him his gracious calm, as well as his holiness. "Rejoice in

the Lord alway." Your Lord desires that your joy may be full. He gives you a joy which no man taketh from you: it is his legacy. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

The subject for this morning is joy, the joy of faith, the joy which is the fruit of the Spirit from the root of trust in God. May we not only talk about it at this hour, but enjoy it now and evermore! It is pleasant to read, and hear, and think about joy; but to be filled with joy and peace through believing is a far more satisfying thing. I want you to see not only the sparkling fountain of joy, but to drink deep draughts of it; yes, and drink all the week, and all the month, and all the year, and all the rest of your lives, both in time and in eternity. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King."

I. First, let us speak a little upon THE KIND OF JOY WHICH IS ALLOTTED TO BELIEVERS: "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee."

Note, first, concerning this joy, that *it is to be universal to all who trust:* "Let *all those* that put their trust in thee rejoice." This is not only for the healthy, but for the sickly; not only for the successful, but for the disappointed; not only for those who have the bird in the hand, but for those who only see it in the bush. Let all rejoice! If you have but a little faith, yet if you are trusting in the Lord, you have a right to joy. It may be, your joy will not rise so high as it might do if your faith were greater; but still, where faith is true, it gives sure ground for joy. O ye babes in grace, ye little children, you that have been newly converted, and sadly feel your feebleness, yet rejoice; for the Lord will bless them that fear him, "both small and great"! "Fear not, thou worm Jacob." "Fear not, little flock." There is a joy which is as milk to nourish babes—a joy which is not as meat with bones in it; for the Lord addeth no sorrow therewith. The little ones of the flock need not vex themselves concerning the deep things of God; for there is joy in those shallows of simple truth where lambs may safely wade. The joy of the Lord is softened down to feeble constitutions, lest it overpower them. The same great sea which floods the vast bays also flows into the tiny creeks. "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice." You, Miss Much-afraid, over yonder, you are to rejoice! You, Mr. Despondency, hardly daring to look up, you must yet learn to sing. As for Mr. Ready-to-halt, he must dance on his crutches, and Feeble-mind must play the music for him. It is the mind of the Holy Ghost that those who trust in the Lord should rejoice before him.

This joy, in the next place, is to be *as constant as to time as it is universal as to persons.* "Let them *ever* shout for joy." Do not be content that a good time in the morning should be followed by dreariness in the afternoon. Do not cultivate an occasional delight, but aim at perpetual joy. To be happy at a revival meeting, and then go home to groan, is a poor business. We should "feel like singing all the time." The believer has abiding arguments for abiding consolation. There is never a time when the saint of God has not great cause for gladness; and if he never doubts and worries till he has a

justifiable reason for distrust, he will never doubt nor worry. "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again"—what? "alway," and yet does the apostle say, "and again"? Yes, he would have us rejoice, and keep on rejoicing, and then rejoice more and more. Brethren, go on piling up your delights. You are the blessed of the Lord, and his blessing reaches "unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills."

Next, *let your joy be manifested.* "Let them ever *shout* for joy." Shouting is an enthusiastic utterance, a method which men use when they have won a victory, when they divide the spoil, when they bear home the harvest, when they tread the vintage, when they drain the goblet. Believers, you may shout for joy with unreserved delight. Some religionists shout, and we would not wish to stop them; but we wish certain of them knew better what they are shouting for. Brethren, since you know whom you have believed, and what you have believed, and what are the deep sources of your joy, do not be so sobered by your knowledge as to become dumb; but the rather imitate the children in the temple, who, if they knew little, loved much, and so shouted in praise of him they loved. "Let them shout for joy." A touch of enthusiasm would be the salvation of many a man's religion. Some Christians are good enough people: they are like wax candles, but they are not lighted. Oh, for a touch of flame! Then would they scatter light, and thus become of service to their families. "Let them shout for joy." Why not? Let not orderly folks object. One said to me the other day, "When I hear you preach I feel as if I must have a shout!" My friend, shout if you feel forced to do so. (Here a hearer cried, "Glory!") Our brother cries, "Glory!" and I say so too. "Glory!" The shouting need not always be done in a public service, or it might hinder devout hearing; but there are times and places where a glorious outburst of enthusiastic joy would quicken life in all around. The ungodly are not half so restrained in their blasphemy as we are in our praise. How is this? They go home making night hideous with their yells: are we never to have an outbreak of consecrated delight? Yes, we will have our high days and holidays, and we will sing and shout for joy till even the heathen say, "The Lord hath done great things for them."

This joy *is to be repeated with variations.* One likes, in music, to hear the same tune played in different ways. So here you have it. "Let them rejoice. Let them ever shout for joy. Let them be joyful in thee." There is no monotony in real joy. In the pretence of mirth one grows dull; but in living joy there is exhilaration. Commend me to the springing well of heavenly joy: its waters are always fresh, clear, sparkling, springing up unto everlasting life. Joy blends many colours in its one ray of light. At times it is quiet, and sits still beneath a weight of glory. I have known it weep, not salt drops, but sweet showers. Have you never cried because of your joy in the Lord? Sometimes joy labours for expression till it is ready to faint; and anon it sings till it rivals the angels. Singing is the natural language of joy; but oftentimes silence suits it even better. Our joy abides in Christ, whether we are quiet or shouting, whether we fall at our Lord's feet as dead, or lean on his bosom in calm delight.

This joy is logical. When I was a child, and went to school, I remember learning out of a book called "Why and Because." Things one learns as a child stick in the memory; and therefore I like a text which has a "because" in it. Here it is: "Let them ever shout for joy, *because* thou defendest them." Emotions are not fired by logic; and yet reasons furnish fuel for the flame. A man may be sad, though he cannot explain his sadness, or he may be greatly glad, though he cannot set forth the reasons for his joy. The joy of a believer in God has a firm foundation: it is not the baseless fabric of a vision. The joy of faith burns like coals of juniper, and yet it can be calmly explained and justified. The joyful believer is no lunatic, carried away by a delusion: he has a "because" with which to account for all his joy—a reason which he can consider on his bed in the night-watches, or defend against a scoffing world. We have a satisfactory reason for our most exuberant joy: "The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." Philosophers can be happy without music, and saints can be happy despite circumstances. With joy we draw water out of deeper and fuller wells than such as father Jacob digged. Our mirth is as soberly reasonable as the worldling's fears.

Once more, the happiness is *a thing of the heart;* for the text runs thus—"Let them that *love thy name* be joyful in thee." We love God. I trust I am speaking to many who could say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Is it not a very happy emotion? What is sweeter than to say, with the tears in one's eyes,—"My God, I love thee!" To sit down and have nothing to ask for, no words to utter, but only for the soul to love—is not this heavenly? Measureless depths of unutterable love are in the soul, and in those depths we find the pearl of joy. When the heart is taken up with so delightful an object as the ever-blessed God, it feels an intensity of joy which cannot be rivalled. When our whole being is steeped in adoring love, then heaven comes streaming down, and we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. I feel I am talking in a poor way about the richest things which are enjoyed by saintly men. Many of you know as much about these matters as I do, perhaps more. But my soul doth even now magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour. Although I feel unworthy and unfit to speak to this vast throng, yet I have a great sympathy with my text, for I am "glad in the Lord."

> "Oh, what immortal joys I feel,
> And raptures all divine;
> For Jesus tells me I am his,
> And my Beloved mine!"

If you sit before the Lord at this time, and indulge your souls with an outflow of love to God and his Son Jesus Christ, and at the same time perceive an inflowing of heavenly joy, it will not much matter how the poor preacher speaks to your ear, for the Lord himself will be heard in your soul, and heaven will flood your being.

II. Now I come to the second head, wherein we will consider THE GROUND AND REASON OF HOLY JOY. I am bound to speak upon

this matter; for I have told you that the joy of the believer is logical, and can be defended by facts; and so indeed it is.

For, first, *the believer's joy arises from the God in whom he trusts.* "Let all those that put their trust *in thee* rejoice." When, after many a weary wandering, the dove of your soul has at last come back to the ark, and Noah has put out his hand and "pulled her in unto him," the poor, weary creature is happy. Taken into Noah's hand and made to nestle in his bosom, she feels so safe, so peaceful! The weary leagues of the wild waste of waters are all forgotten, or only remembered to give zest to the repose. So, when you trust in God, your soul has found a quiet resting-place, a pavilion of repose! The little chick runs to and fro in fear. The mother hen calls it home. She spreads her soft wings over the brood. Have you never seen the little chicks when they are housed under the hen, how they put out their little heads through the feathers and peep and twitter so prettily? It is a chick's heaven to hide under its mother's bosom. It is perfectly happy; it could not be more content; its little chick nature is brimful of delight. Be this thy joy also, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." My nature gets all its wants supplied, all its desires gratified, when it rests in God. Oh, you that have never trusted God in Christ Jesus, you do not know what real happiness means! You may search all the theatres in London, and ransack all the music-halls, and clubs, and public-houses, but you will find no happiness in any of their mirth, or show, or wine. True joy dwells where dwells the living God, and nowhere else. In your own home with God, even though that home be only a single room, and your meal be very scanty, you will see more of heaven than in the palaces of kings! Have God for your sole trust, and you shall never lack for joy.

Our joy arises next *from what the Lord does for us.* "Let them shout for joy, because *thou defendest them.*" God always guards his people, whoever may attack them. "The Lord is thy keeper." Angels are our guardians, providence is our protector; but God himself is the preserver of his chosen. "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." No fortress guards the soldier so well as God guards his redeemed. The God of our salvation will defend us from all evil, he will defend our souls. "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."

Further, *our joy arises out of the love we have towards our God.* "Let them that *love thy name* be joyful in thee." The more you love God, the more you will delight in him. It is the profusion of a mother's love to her child which makes her take such delight in it. Her boy is her joy because of her love. If we loved Jesus better, we should be happier in him. You do not, perhaps, see the connection between the two things; but there is a connection so intimate, that little love *to* Christ brings little joy *in* Christ, and great love *to* Christ brings great joy *in* Christ. God grant that in a full Christ we may have

a full joy! Do you see what I mean? When a man comes to God in Christ and says, "This Saviour is my Saviour, this Father is my Father, this God is my God for ever and ever"; then he has everything, and he must be joyful. He has no fear about the past—God has forgiven him; he has no distress about the present—the Lord is with him; he is not afraid about the future—for the Lord hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." If you understand my text, and put it in practice, you possess the quintessence of happiness, the essential oil of joy. He that hath joy in his barn floor may see it bare; he that hath joy in his wine vats may see them dry; he that hath joy in his children may bury that joy in the grave; he that hath joy in himself will find his beauty consume away; but he that hath joy in God drinketh from "the deep which lieth under"; his springs shall ever flow, "in summer and in winter shall it be."

I have pointed to the deep sources from which the joy of the believer wells up; but I must also add, it is by faith that this joy comes to us. *Faith makes joyful discoveries.* I speak to those of you who have faith. When you first believed in Christ you found that you were saved, and knew that you were forgiven. Some little while after, you discovered that you were chosen of God from before the foundation of the world. Oh, the rapture of your soul, when the Lord appeared of old unto you, saying, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee"! The glorious doctrine of election is as wines on the lees well refined to those who by faith receive it; and it brings with it a new, intense, and refined joy, such as the world knows nothing of. Having discovered your election of God, you looked further into your justification; "for whom he called, them he also justified." What a pearl is justification! In Christ the believer is as just in the sight of God as if he had never sinned: he is covered with a perfect righteousness, and is accepted in the Beloved. What a joy is justification by faith, when it is well understood! What bliss also to learn our union to Christ! Believers are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Because he lives, we shall live also. One with Jesus! Wonderful discovery this! Equally full of joy is our adoption! "Beloved, now are we the sons of God"; "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Faith thus heaps fuel on the fire of our joy; for it keeps on making discoveries out of the Word of the Lord. The more you search the Scriptures, and the nearer you live to God, the more you will enjoy of that great goodness which the Lord has laid up in store for them that fear him. Though "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him"; yet "he hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit"; and thereby he puts gladness into our hearts more than increasing corn and wine could bring.

Furthermore, *faith gives cheering interpretations.* Faith is a prophet who can charmingly interpret a fearsome dream. Faith sees a gain in every loss, a joy in every grief. Read aright, and you will see that a child of God in trouble is on the way to greater blessing. Faith views affliction hopefully. Sorrow may come to us, as it did to David, as a chastisement for sin. Faith reads—"Whom the Lord loveth he

chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Better to be chastened with God's children here than to be condemned with the world hereafter. Faith also sees that affliction may be sent by way of discovery, to make the man know himself, his God, and the promises better. Faith perceives that affliction may be most precious as a test, acting, as doth the fire, when it shows what is pure gold and what is base metal. Faith joys in a test so valuable. Faith spies out the truth, that affliction is sent to develop and mature the Christian life. "Ah, well!" saith Faith, "then, thank God for it. No trial for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it worketh out the peaceable fruit of righteousness in those that are exercised thereby." Faith sees sweet love in every bitter cup. Faith knows that whenever she gets a black envelope from the heavenly post-office, there is treasure in it. When the Lord's black horses call at our door, they bring us double loads of blessing. Up to this moment I, God's servant, beg to bear my unreserved testimony to the fact that it is good for me to have been afflicted. In spiritual life and knowledge and power, I have grown but little except when under the hand of trouble. I set my door open, and am half-inclined to say to pain and sickness and sadness, "Turn in hither; for I know that you will leave a blessing behind. Come, crosses, if you will; for you always turn to crowns." Thus faith glories in tribulations also, and in the lion of adversity finds the honey of joy. I have said that trial comes to us as chastisement, as we see in the case of David; as a discoverer of grace, as we see in Abraham; or as a test, as we see in Job; or as a preventive, as in the case of Paul, who wrote, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me." In every tribulation God is moved by love to his people, and by nothing else. If he cuts the vine with a sharp knife, it is because he would have fruit of it. If he whips his child till he cries like David, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning," it is for his profit, that he may learn obedience by the things which he suffers. All things work together for the believer's good, and so faith interprets sorrow itself into joy.

Moreover, *faith believes great promises.* This opens other wells of joy. I cannot stop to quote them to you this morning: the Book of the Lord is full of them. What more can the Lord say than he hath said? The promises of God are full, and as varied as they are full, and as sure as they are varied, and as rich as they are sure. "Exceeding great and precious promises." When I wrote "*The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith*" I was at no loss to find a promise for every day in the year; the difficulty was which to leave out. The promises are like the bells on the garments of our Great High-priest for ever ringing out holy melodies. When a man gets a promise fairly into the hand of faith, and goes to God with it, he must rejoice. The children of the promise are all of them worthy to be called Isaac, that is, "Laughter"; for God hath made him to laugh who lives according to promise. To live on the promises of man would be starvation; but to live on the promises of God is to feed on fat things full of marrow.

Above all, *faith has an eye to the eternal reward.* She rejoices in her prospects. She takes into her hand the birds which to others are in the bush. To be with Christ in the glory-land is the joy of hope, the hope which maketh not ashamed. Our hope is no dream: as sure as we are here to-day, we who are trusting in Christ will be in heaven before long; for he prays that we may be with him where he is, and may behold his glory. Let us not wish to postpone the happy day. Shall our bridal day be kept back? Nay, let the Bridegroom speedily come, and take us to himself. What a joy to know that this head shall wear a crown of glory, and these hands shall wave the palm branch of victory! I speak not of myself alone, my brethren, but of you also, and of all them that love his appearing. There is a crown of life laid up for you, which the righteous Judge will give you. Wherefore, have patience a little while. Bear still your cross. Put up with the difficulties of the way, for the end is almost within sight.

> "The way may be rough, but it cannot be long:
> So we'll smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

May the Lord give us the ears of faith wherewith to hear the bells of heaven ringing out from afar over the waters of time!

Faith has always reason for joy, since God is always the same, his promises are the same, and his power and will to fulfil are the same. In an unchanging God we find unchanging reasons for joy. If we draw water from the well of God, we may draw one day as well as another, and never find the water abated; but if we make our joy to depend in part upon creatures and circumstances, we may find our joy leak out through the cracks in the cistern. Last Sunday morning I cried out to you, "Both feet on the rock! Both feet on the rock!" and the words led one poor heart to try the power of undivided faith in God. This is the road to joy, and there is no other. Drink waters from thine own fountain, and do not gad abroad after others. Is not the Lord enough for thee? Is it not sufficient to say, "All my fresh springs are in thee"? Neither life, nor death, nor poverty, nor sickness, nor bereavement, nor slander, nor death itself, shall quench thy joy if it be founded in God alone.

III. We will look, for a minute or two, into a third matter, which is THE FAILURES REPORTED CONCERNING THIS JOY.

I think I hear somebody say, "It is all very well for you to tell us that believers are joyful, and have logical reasons for gladness; but some of them are about as dull as can be, and create dulness in others." I am obliged to speak very carefully here, for I am afraid that certain Christians give cause for this objection.

Let me say to some of you who love to raise objections, *What do you know about this joy?* Are you unbelievers? Well, then, you are out of court: you are not competent to judge. The griefs of believers you do not know, and with their joy you cannot intermeddle. You have no spiritual taste or discernment, and what judgment can you form? A genuine believer may be as happy as the angels, and yet you may not know his joy, because you are not in the secret. You have not a spiritual mind, and the carnal mind cannot discern spiritual things. I would have you speak with bated breath when you talk on

this matter. When a blind man goes to the Royal Academy, his criticisms on the pictures are not worth much; but they are quite equal in value to yours when you speak of spiritual things. You cannot know what joy in the Lord may mean; for, alas! you a stranger to such heavenly things.

Alas! *some professors of religion are mere pretenders*, these have no joy of the Lord. To carry out their pretence, these persons even imagine that it is necessary to pull a long face and to talk very solemnly, not to say dismally. Their idea of religion is, that black is the colour of heaven. But, dear friends, we cannot prevent hypocrites arising; it is only a proof that true religion is worth having. You took a bad half sovereign the other night, did you? Did you say, "All half sovereigns are worthless, I will never take another"? Not so: you became more careful, but you were quite sure that there were good half sovereigns in currency; for else people would not make counterfeit ones. It would not pay anybody to be a hypocrite unless there were enough genuine Christians to make the hypocrites pass current. Therefore, do not say too much about hypocritical weepers, lest you slander true men.

Next, remember that *some persons are constitutionally sad.* They cried as soon as they were born; they cried when they cut their teeth; and they have cried ever since. Their spirits are very low down, and when the grace of God gets into their hearts it lifts them a great deal to bring them up to a decent level of joy. Think of what they would have been without it. Many would have died in despair, if it had not been for faith. The grace of God has kept them up, or they would have lost their reason. I am sorry there should be persons who have bad livers, feeble digestions, or irritated brains; but there are such. Pity them, even if you blame them. They must not so pity themselves as to make an excuse for their unbelief; but we must remember that often the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.

When you have met with Christians who are not happy, did it never strike you that *their depression might only be for a time* under very severe trial? You may go to the South of France, where the days are so sunny, and you may happen to be there for a couple of days only, and it may rain all the time: it would be unfair on that account to say that it is a gloomy place. So it may be that the Christian is under extreme pressure for the time, and when that is moderated he will be very joyful. I do not excuse his loss of joy; but, still, there is a November of fogs in the year of most men. Judge no man by the day, but watch his spirit on a larger scale, and see whether he does not usually delight himself in God.

Moreover, I would like to say a very pointed thing to some people who charge the saints with undue sadness. *May you not be guilty of making them so?* There is an unkind, morose, wicked, drinking husband, and he says, "My wife's religion makes her miserable." No. It is not her religion, but her husband. You are enough to make twenty people unhappy: you know you are; and therefore do not blame the poor woman, if, when she sees you, the tear is in her eye. Alas! when she thinks of your going down to hell, and knows that she will be parted from you for ever, the more she loves you the more sad she

is to think of you. "Oh," says some wild boy here, "my mother is wretched!" I do not wonder; I should be wretched too, if you were my son. If any of you are living ungodly lives, it makes your parents' hearts ache to see you going headlong to perdition. Is it not abominable that a man should make another miserable, and then blame him for being so? If you were but saved, how your mother's face would brighten up! If your father saw his boy turn to the Lord, he would be as happy as the birds in spring. Speak tenderly on this matter lest you accuse yourself.

If you say that some Christians are unhappy, *must you not also admit that many of them are very happy?* I was once waited upon by an enthusiast who had a new religion to publish. Numbers of people have a crack which lets in new light, and this man was going to convert me to his new ideas. After I had heard him, I said, "I have heard your story, will you hear mine?" When I talked to him of my lot and portion in the love of a covenant God, and the safety of the believer in Christ, he said, "Now, sir, if you believe all this, you ought to be the happiest man in the world." I admitted that his inference was true; but then I said to him, what rather surprised him, "So I am; and I am going to be more so all the rest of my life." If a man is chosen of God from before the foundation of the world, is redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, is quickened by the Holy Ghost, and renewed in the spirit of his mind, is one with Christ, and on his way to heaven; if he is not happy, he ought to be. Surely, we ought to rejoice abundantly, dear friends, for ours is a happy lot. "Happy are the people whose God is the Lord."

If God's people are not happy at times, *it is not their faith which makes them unhappy*—ask them. It is not what you believe that makes you unhappy, it is your want of faith, is it not? If a man begins to doubt, he begins to sorrow: so far as his faith goes, he has joy. Oh, for more faith! Faith does create joy. We can answer all objections by the fact that "we that have believed do enter into rest."

IV. I close by mentioning THE ARGUMENTS FOR ABOUNDING IN JOY. You cannot argue a man into gladness, but you may possibly stir him up to see that which will make him happy.

First, you see in my text *a permit* to be glad: "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice." You have here a ticket to the banquets of joy. You may be as happy as ever you like. You have divine permission to shout for joy. Yonder is the inner sanctuary of happiness. You cry, "May I come in?" Yes, if by faith you can grasp the text, "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice." "But may I be happy?" asks one. "May I be glad? May I? Is there joy for me?" Do you trust in the Lord? Then you have your passport; travel in the land of light.

But the text is not only a permit, it is *a precept*. When it says, "Let them shout for joy," it means that they are commanded to do so. Blessed is that religion wherein it is a duty to be happy. Come, ye mournful ones, be glad. Ye discontented grumblers, come out of that dog-hole! Enter the palace of the King! Quit your dunghills; ascend your thrones. The precept commands it: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

We have here more than a permit and a precept, it is *a prayer*. David prays it, the Lord Jesus prays it by David. Let them rejoice, let them be joyful in thee! Will he not grant the prayer which he has inspired by causing us to rejoice through lifting upon us the light of his countenance? Pray for joy yourself, saying with David, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."

The text might be read as *a promise:* "All those that put their trust in thee shall rejoice." God promises joy and gladness to believers. Light is sown for them: the Lord will turn their night into day.

Listen to the following line of argument, which shall be very brief. You only act reasonably when you rejoice. If you are chosen of God, and redeemed by blood, and have been made an heir of heaven, you ought to rejoice. We pray you, act not contrary to nature and reason. Do not fly in the face of great and precious truths. From what you profess, you are bound to be joyful.

You will best baffle your adversaries by being happy. David talks about them in both these psalms; but he does not fret, he simply goes on rejoicing in God. "They say; they say": let them say! "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." But the attack is cruel. No doubt it is, but the Lord knows all about it. Do not cease to rest in him. If your heart is full of God's love, you can easily bear all that the enemy may cast upon you.

Abound in joy, for then you will behave best to those who are round about you. When a man is unhappy, he usually makes other people so; and a person that is miserable is generally unkind, and frequently unjust. It is often dyspepsia that makes a man find fault with his servants and wife and children. If a man is at peace with himself, he is peaceful with others. Get right within, and you will be right without. One of the best specifics for good temper is communion with God, and consequent joy of heart.

You yourself also, if you are happy, will be strong: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." If you lose your joy in your religion, you will be a poor worker: you cannot bear strong testimony, you cannot bear stern trial, you cannot lead a powerful life. In proportion as you maintain your joy, you will be strong *in* the Lord, and *for* the Lord.

Do you not know that if you are full of joy you will be turning the charming side of religion where men can see it? I should not like to wear my coat with the seamy side out: some religionists always do that. It was said of one great professor, that he looked as if his religion did not agree with him. Godliness is not a rack or a thumbscrew. Behave not to religion as if you felt that you must take it, like so much physic, but you had rather not. If it tastes like nauseous physic to you, I should fear you have got the wrong sort, and are poisoning yourself. Believe not that true godliness is akin to sourness. Cheerfulness is next to godliness. "When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast." Weed out levity, but cultivate joy. Thus will you win other hearts to follow Jesus.

Remember, that if you are always joyful, you are rehearsing the

music of the skies. We are going there very soon, let us not be ignorant of the music of its choirs. I should not like to crowd into my seat, and hear the choirmaster say, "Do you know your part?" and then have to answer, "Oh, no, I have never sung while I was on earth; for I had no joy in the Lord." I think I shall answer to the choirmaster, and say, "Yes; I have long since sung, 'Worthy is the Lamb,'"

"I would begin the music here,
And so my soul shall rise:
Oh, for some heavenly notes, to bear
My passions to the skies!"

With joy we rehearse the song of songs. We pay glad homage now before Jehovah's throne. We sing unto the Lord our gladsome harmonies, and we will do so as long as we have any being. Pass me that score, O chief musician of the skies, for I can take it up and sing my part in bass, or tenor, or treble, or alto, or soprano, as my voice may be. The key is joy in God. Whatever the part assigned us, the music is all for Jesus.

May some of you that have never joyed in Jesus Christ learn how to praise him to-day by being washed in his precious blood! You that have praised him long, may you learn your score yet more fully, and sing in better tune henceforth, and for evermore! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms iv. and v.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—136 (Song I.); 4; 103 (Vers. II.)

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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NOAH'S FAITH, FEAR, OBEDIENCE, AND SALVATION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 1ST, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."—Hebrews xi. 7.

THE apostle could not avoid mentioning Noah; for in him faith shone forth eminently. He has placed him in due order of time after Abel and Enoch; but he had also another reason for the arrangement. These three ancient believers are declared in Holy Writ to have pleased God. Of Abel, it is said that God testified of his gifts. Enoch, before his translation, had this testimony, that he pleased God: and Noah "found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Again, it was meet that Noah should follow close upon Enoch, as one of two who are described as having "walked with God." "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him"; and we read in the sixth chapter of Genesis, verse eight, that Noah also "walked with God." These two spent their lives in such constant communion with the Most High that they could be fully described as walking with God. Oh, that we may, through almighty grace, be so pleasing unto the Lord that we may abide in fellowship with him!

We may take pleasure in thinking of Noah as a kind of contrast to Enoch. Enoch was taken away from the evil to come: he saw not the flood, nor heard the wailing of those who were swept away by the waterfloods. His was a delightful deliverance from the harvest of wrath which followed the universal godlessness of the race. It was not his to fight the battle of righteousness to the bitter end; but by a secret rapture he avoided death, and escaped those evil days in which his grandson's lot was cast. Noah is the picture of one who is the Lord's witness during evil days, and lives through them faithfully, enduring unto the end. It was his to be delivered from death by death. The ark was, so to speak, a coffin to him: he entered it, and became a dead man to the old world; and within its enclosure he was floated into a new world, to become the founder and father of a new race. As in the figure of baptism we see life by burial, so was it with this chosen patriarch; he passed by burial in the ark into a new life. In Enoch

we see a type of those of God's people who will go home peacefully before the last closing struggle. Ere the first clash of swords at Armageddon, such Enochs will be taken from the evil to come. But in Noah we see those who will engage in the conflict, and bear themselves bravely amid backsliding and apostasy, until they shall see the powers of evil trodden under their feet as straw is trodden for the dunghill. The fire-flood will devour the wicked, and only the righteous shall inherit the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Let these few words stand as the preface to my discourse; and now let us carefully consider Noah's faith, trusting that the Holy Spirit may bless its teaching to our own souls.

I. First, notice that in Noah's case FAITH WAS THE FIRST PRINCIPLE. The text begins, "*By faith* Noah." We shall have to speak about his fear—being "moved by fear"; we shall also remember his obedience, for he "prepared an ark to the saving of his house." But you must take distinct note that at the back of everything was his faith in God. His faith begat his fear: his faith and his fear produced his obedience. Nothing in Noah is held up before us as an example, but that which grew out of his faith. To begin with, we must look well to our faith. May I pass the question round these galleries, and put it to you also in this vast area? Have you faith? Let each one hear the question in the singular number. "Hast thou faith? Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Art thou resting in the promise of a faithful God?" If not, thou art nothing as to spiritual things. Without faith thou art out of the kingdom of grace, a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter if thou hast no faith. But if thou hast even a trembling faith, thou hast the root of the matter within thee. Even if other gracious things be not in thee as yet, they will be ere long produced by faith. Faith is the acorn, from which the oak of holiness will grow. Faith is that handful of corn, the fruit whereof shall shake like Lebanon. Without faith it is impossible to please God, but with faith we become "accepted in the Beloved."

Notice, first, that *Noah believed in God in his ordinary life.* Before the great test came, before he heard the oracle from the secret place, Noah believed in God. We know that he did, for we read that he walked with God, and in his common conduct he is described as being "a just man, and perfect in his generations." To be just in the sight of God is never possible apart from faith; for "the just shall live by faith." It is a great thing to have faith in the presence of a terrible trial; but the first essential is to have faith for ordinary every-day consumption. Hast thou faith in God as to thy daily bread? Hast thou faith as to thy children and thy house? Hast thou faith about thy trade and business? Hast thou faith in the God of providence?—faith in the God who answers prayer? Is it habitual with thee to roll thy burden upon the Lord? If it be not so with thee, what wilt thou do when the floods break forth? Faith will not come to thee all of a sudden, in the dark night, if thou hast shut it out through all the bright days. Faith must be a constant tenant, not an occasional guest. I have heard of Latter-day Saints, and I do not think much of them: I far more admire Every-day Saints. Thou needest faith this

Sabbath-day: have it, and come to the communion-table with it. But thou needest faith on Monday, when the shutters are taken down to begin another six days' trading. Thou wilt need faith the next day; for who can tell thee what will happen? To the end of the week thou wilt need to look to the hills whence cometh thine help. Thou needest faith anywhere and everywhere. A man of God alone in his chamber still needs faith, or solitude may be a nest for temptation. When the servant of Christ is at his ease, and has no work pressing upon him, he has need of faith to keep him, lest, like David, he fall into temptation, and commit folly. Rest days or work days, we alike need faith. By faith Noah did everything before he entered the ark. This is an important observation, though it may appear a very simple one. I could not omit it; for I feel that a practical work-day faith is what we most of all need. Men think that they need faith in building a temple; but faith is also needed in building a haystack. We need faith for ploughing, for buying, for selling, for working, quite as much as for praying, and singing, and preaching. We want faith on the market as well as in the prayer-meeting. We wish everywhere to please God, and we cannot do it anywhere unless we have unfeigned faith in him. The Lord teach us to have faith seven days in the week!

Note, next, that *Noah had faith in the warning and threatening of God.* Faith is to be exercised about the commandments; for David says, "I have believed thy commandments." Faith is to be exercised upon the promises; for there its sweetest business lies. But, believe me, you cannot have faith in the promise unless you are prepared to have faith in the threatening also. If you truly believe a man, you believe all that he says. He who does not believe that God will punish sin, will not believe that God will pardon it through the atoning blood. He who does not believe that God will cast unbelievers into hell, will not be sure that he will take believers into heaven. If we doubt God's Word about one thing, we shall have small confidence in it upon another thing. Sincere faith in God must treat all God's Word alike; for the faith which accepts one word of God and rejects another is evidently not faith in God, but faith in our own judgment, faith in our own taste. Only that is true faith which believes everything that is revealed by the Holy Spirit, whether it be joyous or distressing. Noah had, in this case, received a promise; but, as the dark background to it, he had listened to the terrible threatening that God would destroy all living things with a flood: his faith believed both the warning and the promise. If he had not believed the threat, he would not have prepared an ark, and so would not have received the promise. Men do not prepare an ark to escape from a flood unless they believe that there will be a flood. I charge you who profess to be the Lord's not to be unbelieving with regard to the terrible threatenings of God to the ungodly. Believe the threat, even though it should chill your blood; believe, though nature shrinks from the overwhelming doom; for, if you do not believe, the act of disbelieving God about one point will drive you to disbelieve him upon the other parts of revealed truth, and you will never come to that true, childlike faith which God will accept and honour. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark."

With solemn awe believe the bitter word of judgment, that the word of mercy may be sweet to you.

Furthermore, *Noah believed what seemed highly improbable, if not absolutely impossible.* There was no sea where Noah laid the keel of his ark: I do not even know that there was a river there. He was to prepare a sea-going vessel, and construct it on dry land. How could water be brought there to float it? O mad old man! how canst thou play the fool on so huge a scale as to build a three-decked vessel of vast dimensions where no waters can ever come? Yet he was bidden of the Lord to do it, and he was persuaded that the Lord's command involved no blunder. The floods would fill the valley, rise up the hills, and prevail above the tops of the mountains. He believed all this, although it did seem an unlikely thing. That faith which believes in the probable is anybody's faith: publicans and sinners can so believe. The faith which believes that which is barely possible is in better form; but that faith which cares nothing for probability or possibility, but rests alone in the Word of the Lord, is the faith of God's elect. God deserves such faith, "for with God all things are possible." Not probability, but certainty, is the groundwork of faith when God has spoken. Noah believed firmly, and therefore prepared his ship on dry land, quite as cheerfully as he would have built it by the sea.

At times you and I are assailed as to our faith in the Bible, by people who say, "How do you make that out? It is in the Scriptures, certainly, but how do you reconcile it with science?" Let your reply be—We no longer live in the region of argument as to the Word of the Lord; but we dwell in the realm of faith. We are not squabblers, itching to prove our superiority in reasoning, but we are children of light, worshipping our God by bowing our whole minds to the obedience of faith. We would be humble, and learn to believe what we cannot altogether comprehend, and to expect what we should never have looked for, had not the Lord declared it. It is our ambition to be great believers, rather than great thinkers; to be child-like in faith, rather than subtle in intellect. We are sure that God is true! Like Noah, we stagger not at the Word of God, because of evident improbability and apparent impossibility. What the Lord has spoken he is able to make good; and none of his words shall fall to the ground.

Note well, that *Noah believed alone, and preached on though none followed him.* There were no other believers, if you except his wife and his sons and daughters. There were eight in all; but I am afraid that some of these rather believed in father Noah than in the living God. Noah shone as a lone star. He stood like yonder solitary column in the midst of a ruined temple. He believed with an unbuttressed faith. How pleasant it is to associate with our fellow-believers! It is a great refreshment for a solitary Christian to get into a large congregation, and to feel in unison with the child's hymn—

> "Lord, how delightful 'tis to see
> A great assembly worship thee!
> At once they sing, at once they pray,
> They hear of heaven and learn the way.
>
> I have been there, and still would go,
> 'Tis like a little heaven below."

But how would you fare if you were alone, or were surrounded by those who called you a fool for believing in the Lord? To dwell where everybody is sceptical is as injurious to faith as for a man to live where the yellow fever is raging. To have your faith pulled to pieces, and held up to ridicule, is an ordeal which some cannot stand. What if you should be like Noah, a preacher of righteousness; how stern the duty of being a solitary witness! He preached for one hundred and twenty years, and at the end of it not one person was ready to go with him into the ark. His own family was saved, but nobody else—not a solitary one. What a trial! How it has made my heart glad, during the month of May, to see and propose for church-fellowship no less than sixty-nine! But if I had to preach for a year with no converts, what should I do? I hope I should persevere, in the name of the Lord God; but what a trial! What if life were prolonged for one hundred and twenty years, and after all that preaching nobody believed your word! That would be an infliction indeed. Many people may have been converted under Noah, and may have died before the deluge came; but he had not one convert in the ark with him. His wife had not even a servant to help her in domestic work, and his sons' wives had to wait on themselves. There was not even a boy to clean the shoes, or help feed the animals. Many were called, but only the eight were chosen. Noah had preached apparently in vain, and yet he believed with none the less of dogged resolve. The old man was not to be moved. That ark of his would float; he knew it would. The world would be destroyed; he was sure of it; as sure as if he had seen it. "Things not seen as yet" were to his faith substantial and evident.

Noah believed through a hundred and twenty solitary years! It was a long martyrdom. Our life is quite long enough for the trial of faith. Even if a man lives to be eighty, and has sixty years of that life spent in the exercise of faith, it is only by almighty grace that he holds out. Noah lived two of our lives in this way. If a little flood had happened and moved his ark a little, he would have had some evidence for his faith; but there was no flood at all; and his ark lay high and dry for a century and a quarter! How few could endure this! Yonder dear friend has been praying for the last six months, and the Lord has not heard him, and he begins to doubt whether the Lord does hear prayer at all. You are not much like Noah. You can hardly believe for one hundred and twenty days. "Alas!" says one, "I have prayed for my husband these twenty years!" It is a long time to wait; but what would you do with a hundred added on to it? Years made Noah's faith more mature, and not more feeble. This grey father of the age went on with his preaching, went on with his intercession, and, without a doubt, waited for God in his own time to justify his servant before the eyes of men.

Once more: *Noah believed even to separation from the world.* See Noah and his family entering the ark! I do not think I should have selected the ark as a place of residence myself, nor would you have chosen to live in a place pitched within and without with pitch, with only one door and one window to it, and a great menagerie of birds, and beasts, and reptiles inside it. Whether that window ran all round

the top just under the roof, so as to let light into the whole structure, I cannot tell; but I have no doubt that the jeering world said to Noah, "Well, old man, you have built a prison for yourself, and the sooner you go inside and shut yourself in the better; for we have had enough of your preaching!" When the good man and his family went in, and the Lord shut the door, they were dead to the world. Had Mrs. Noah been like some of you she would have said, "The girls cannot go out to any more parties, and our sons are shut out from all society. We are out of the world, and shall soon be forgotten." Yes, yes, and Noah was glad of it, since it was the Lord that shut him in. When the Lord shuts you off from the world, you are best alone. Nowadays professors have not faith enough to dwell alone. They want two or three doors in the back of the ark, so that they may slip out every now and then, and do a little pleasuring with the world, and then glide back again and look like saints. As to being shut in with God and separated from the world—religious and irreligious—how few will endure it! How little is ever heard of that cry—"Come out from among them, and be ye separate!" "You might as well be dead," cries one, "as be out of society." Exactly so: and that is what the child of God looks for. "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "Buried with him by baptism into death." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." That separatedness which Noah took upon himself so willingly was involved in his salvation; for if he had lived with the world, he would have died with the world. Only in separation is salvation.

Thus have I worked out the idea that the first principle which actuated Noah's heart was faith in the living God.

II. Secondly, FEAR WAS THE MOVING FORCE Faith was the living principle, but fear was the moving power; for the text puts it, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, *moved with fear*." Faith moulded him, but fear moved him. How was this? "I thought," says one, "that perfect love casteth out fear." Yes, fear of a certain sort; but there is another fear which perfect love embraces and nourishes.

Noah had no evil fear. He had not a servile fear: he was not afraid of God as a culprit is afraid of a judge, or a convict of the hangman. He knew whom he believed, and was persuaded that he had a favour towards him. Noah had not a careless fear, as some here have. Fools say, "We never shall be saved, and therefore it would be useless to care about it. We may as well gather the rosebuds while we may. There is no heaven for us hereafter, let us make the best of the present." No, Noah was a witness against such sensual carelessness. He so believed, that fear came upon him, and that fear made him act as God bade him. Beware of the unbelief which enables you to trifle; for trifling with eternal things is the suicide of the soul. Noah, on the other hand, had not a despairing fear, as some have. They say, "There is no hope. We have gone too far in sin already to dream of pardon and favour. We may as well let things take their course." Beware of the poison-cup of despair. While life lasts hope lasts; and we beseech you not to lie down in sullen hopelessness. Noah

was a stranger to this paralyzing fear: he bestirred himself, and built an ark. Some allow a presuming fear: "If I am to be saved," say they, "I shall be saved; and if I am to be lost, I shall be lost. I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and so I will have my fling, and go into sin even as I please." Noah never spoke thus; for with his fear he had a good hope. He prepared an ark. He knew that none could save him but God; but as God bade him prepare an ark, an ark he prepared, and thus he was saved and his house.

What kind of fear was that of Noah? Well, *Noah had a loyal reverence of God.* He feared him as the King of kings and Lord of lords, and when he went about through the wicked world Noah often said to himself, "I wonder the Judge of all the earth does not destroy these rebels, who dare to be so vile and violent." When he saw their gluttony, their infidelity, their lasciviousness, their oppression of one another, *the preacher of righteousness had a holy fear of judgment.* Often his righteous spirit indignantly cried, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" He wondered how God could be so long-suffering. When it was revealed to him that God was going to destroy the whole race from off the face of the earth by a flood, he said to himself, "I thought he would." He felt exceedingly afraid; for he knew that when God once makes bare his arm for vengeance, the pillars of the earth must shake, and the stars of heaven cease their shining. Thus the holy man of God passed the time of his sojourning here in fear. Who among us would not fear if we were to consider at this time the holiness of God, and the provocations inflicted upon him by our guilty race? What sin defiles this earth! Oh, the wrath to come! How awful will the judgment be! It has not come yet; it may not come for years; but, when the Lord begins to deal with men in justice, how will that day burn as an oven! "Who may abide the day of his coming?" Noah by faith heard the cries of men and women swept from their feet by the torrent. He heard the cries of strong swimmers in their agony yielding to the overflowing death, and sinking to their doom. Do you wonder that his heart sank within him, and that he was moved with fear? He had a holy awe of God, and a solemn dread of the judgments which sin was drawing down upon the giddy world.

Noah had a very humble distrust of himself. I wish we all had such a fear. Let us fear God because of his greatness; let us fear ourselves because of our sinfulness. Let us fear lest we should fall into sin, and perish with the rest of the sinners. Let no man say, "I shall never fall." Alas! those are the most likely to slip. Did you never note that those who seem least likely to fall into a sin are the very people who commit it? You would not have dreamed that sober Noah should be found drunk; nor that righteous Lot should commit incest; nor that David, whose heart smote him when he only cut off the lap of Saul's garment, should be guilty of murder; nor that Peter, who said, "Though all men should forsake thee, yet will not I," would have denied his Master with oaths and cursing. Ah, friends! we may not trust ourselves; but we ought to stand in daily fear lest we be guilty before God. Here was Noah filled with such a holy fear of himself, that he took care to do what the Lord bade him, even

to the most minute particular. He did not choose another sort of wood, nor alter the shape of the vessel, nor make more stories, nor more windows, nor more doors; but he distrusted his own judgment, and leaned not to his own understanding. He did exactly what he was told to do, and thus left the consequences with the Lord who commanded him. He feared his own wisdom: for he knew that man is like to vanity, and no more to be relied upon than the mist of the morning.

Fear made Noah hew the trees and square the timbers, and wield the axe and the hammer. Fear wrought in him diligence and speed. It made him despise the observations of onlookers, and build for his life in brave defiance of the spirit of the age, and the judgment of the wise. Perhaps I speak to persons who are in fear of the wrath to come. I rejoice that you have faith enough to fear. By the way of that faith which brings you unto fear, you will be brought out of it. Believe God in justice till you tremble; then see that justice vindicated in the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus, and rest in the mercy of God, which, through the cross, comes justly down to guilty men. A holy fear will put wings upon your heels, and help you to fly to Jesus. Moved by fear, may you be drawn and driven to the Lord Jesus!

III. Thirdly, OBEDIENCE WAS THE GRACIOUS FRUIT. Faith and fear together led Noah to do as God commanded him. When fear is grafted upon faith, it brings forth good fruit, as in this case.

Noah obeyed the Lord exactly. How often does the Scripture say, "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he"! See again and again, "Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him." Those who have faith in God should show it by a holy fear, which makes them zealous to leave nothing undone which is commanded of the Lord, and to add nothing of will-worship to the perfect law of God. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it;" was the wise word of the Virgin. Obey the Lord with all your mind and all your heart, in the way of faith, if you would find salvation. Prove that you have grace, by your accurate obedience.

Noah obeyed the Lord very carefully. God said to him, "Make an ark"; and we read in answer thereto that he *prepared an ark.* There was careful preparation, and not hurried, thoughtless activity. He prepared the right materials; he prepared the different parts so as to fit together: he prepared his mind, and then prepared his work. In seeking the Lord, let us exercise our best thoughts. People do not go to heaven in the fashion of "hop, skip, and jump." Carelessness cannot tread the highway of holiness. If you would know the way to hell, you may shut your eyes and find it: a little matter of neglect will surely ruin you—"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" But if you desire to go to heaven, I beg you to remember that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." There must be determination, thought, care, attention; and faith must work with all these to produce obedience to the will of the Lord. Men are never right by accident, nor obedient to the Lord by chance; preparation of heart is wanted, and this the Lord must give. Alas! I fear some of you will miss eternal

life, for you trifle about it! If you had a business to settle which involved the gain or loss of ten thousand pounds, how particular you would be; but when your whole soul is at stake, how many take up such matters at haphazard and risk eternal destruction! Not so Noah: he was precise in his obedience, and careful to remain so.

Noah obeyed at all costs. To build the huge vessel called "the ark" must have cost Noah a great deal of money and labour. He could not get everybody to work at the absurd task of building a vessel on dry land. As they would be laughed at, his workmen would be sure to demand extra pay. Possibly he had to pay double wages to every wright employed on the ark. The patriarch was content to sink all his capital and all his income in this singular venture. It was a poor speculation—so everybody told him; and yet he was quite willing to put all his eggs into that one basket. God had bidden him build, and build he would, feeling that the divine command insured him against risk. Can we do the same?

Noah went on obeying under daily scorn. The men of that generation mocked him. He went out and preached to them; but many would not hear him, for they thought him mad. Those who did listen to him said to each other, "He is building a vessel upon dry land: is he sane? We are scientific, and therefore we know how absurd his preaching is; for none ever heard of the world being drowned by a flood." They called his warning "an old wives' fable," and he himself was "an old fossil." Doubtless he was the frequent subject of sarcastic remark. I cannot reproduce the letters that were written about the sturdy patriarch, nor can I recount the spiteful things which were said by the gossips; but I have no doubt they were very clever, and very sarcastic. Those productions of genius are all forgotten now; but Noah is remembered still. For all the scorning of many he went on obeying his God: he stuck to the lines on which God had placed him, and he could not be turned to the right hand or to the left, because he had a real faith in God.

Noah's obedience followed the command as he learned it. I admire his going into the ark without a question. All the cattle and the beasts and flying things are in the ark with him, and he does not pray to be let out. We may equally admire him for coming out again when called upon to do so. After we have once been shut in, some of us had rather stop in. We are not fond of changes. We grow accustomed to a certain line of things, and find in use a second nature; and we wish to remain as we are. It is so safe in the ark, and we are so peaceful, so conscious of being in the hollow of God's hand, that we fear to come forth into a world so lately cursed. Noah came out without a question, and the first thing he did was to build an altar to the Lord, and so to prove that he was at home with God. Oh, for faith that will obey God anyhow and anywhere! You remember how God said to Elijah, "Hide thyself"; and away went the prophet to the brook Cherith, where none saw him but the fowls of heaven. A brave prophet like Elijah finds it hard to be in hiding; yet he does not disobey. Presently comes the command, "Go, show thyself"; and out he comes from his exile and stands before King Ahab, according to the word of the Lord. Whether God bids his

true servants show themselves or hide themselves, they do his will at once.

> "Theirs not to reason why,
> Theirs but to dare and die."

The will of the Lord is to be done by his servants, whether on earth or in heaven. If he saith, "Go," they go; if he saith, "Stay," they abide in their places. Oh, for such a faith as this! It was easier for Noah to build the ark than to render so complete an obedience; but the Lord wrought in him by his grace.

IV. And now I come to my last point, upon which hear me patiently. RESULTS DID NOT FAIL TO COME. One hundred and twenty years preaching, and no converts remaining! One hundred and twenty years building a ship, and yet no water to float it! One hundred and twenty years warning people that God is about to destroy them, and yet no flood! Surely, the good man's life is a failure. No doubt wise folks said of him, "He is a good old man, but he is uncharitable, and has become an alarmist." Some style him a "pessimist," others say, "He is a bigot"; others, again, affect to deplore that the good man has made such a great mistake, and is wasting his influence under a delusion. I hear fine gentlemen saying, "Do not take much notice of the old gentleman. No doubt he is a very good man, but at the same time he is only one, and his views are very peculiar. He has gone on chopping this logic for one hundred and twenty years, and the world is not drowned yet: it is really too ridiculous." The wilder spirits meet him in the morning, and they say, "Well, father Noah, when is this flood coming? The country would be improved by a good soaking. You have raised our expectations so long, that it ought to pour when it does come. You ought to have minded the old saying, 'Never prophesy till you are sure.'" Thus would they jest at the preacher of righteousness; but Noah knew what he was at, and was not silenced. All that he did was simply to repeat his warning, and go on with his ship-building. God's time was coming on: the storm was gathering, and before long the deluge would end the mirth of the godless.

What did come of it? The first result was, *he was saved and his house.* Oh, that God would give to every preacher of righteousness this full reward—himself and his house! O my brothers in the ministry, there is no greater joy for us than to know that our children walk in the truth! Perhaps some of you fear the Lord; and yet he has never given you your Shem, Ham, and Japhet. Alas! it may even happen that she that lieth in your bosom does not yet know the Lord. Nevertheless, be you faithful to your God, and to the souls of men. Hold the truth, if you stand alone. Even if in your own house you find your worst foes, hold on, and never doubt. Do not come down a step or two as to holiness, nor seek a lower platform upon which to meet more cordially an ungodly world. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the ever-blessed gospel. That is the one business of your life; and I believe that if you have faith in the Lord as to your family, your beloved ones shall be given you as a prey. Remember the Philippian gaoler, to whom

Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, *and thy house.*" Do not rest content with half the promise. Grasp firmly the words, "and thy house." Have you an Ishmael? then get alone, and, like Abraham, cry to God, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" God will hear your prayer and bless Ishmael also. Oh, what a privilege it will be if you yourself and all your house are saved!

The next result was, that *he condemned the world.* Read, "By which he condemned the world." "Ha! ha! ha!" they said, "we judge the old man to be out of his mind." But he was their judge. The merriest jest that flashed forth at the banquet of wine was pointed with a sarcasm about old Noah and his dry-land ship; but all the while he was solemnly judging and condemning that ribald world. The Lord had made him serenely bear witness against iniquity; yes, and even to sit on the throne and condemn the world. I do not read that Noah ever entered into any dispute with the men of his times. He never argued or cavilled, much less did he wish them ill; he simply believed and told them the truth, kept his own faith intact, and went on building his ark; thus practising what he believed. In this way he condemned those who criticized him. Ah! you may laugh, ye worldlings; but the man of God is your master after all! His preaching condemned them: they knew the way, and wickedly refused to run in it. His warning condemned them: they would not regard it and escape. His life condemned them, for he walked with the God whom they despised. Most of all, the ark condemned them. Did none of them ever say, as he passed it in the morning, "This is the strangest fabric that ever was. There is not, in all the world besides, such another thing as this. Yet Noah is no fool. He can make a bargain, as I found to my cost, when he was buying nails, and I tried to get double their value from him. The man is cool and calm, shrewd and sharp. He bought my wood upon the hill; but he first made an accurate estimate of the timber in it, and its worth: he bought as well as any man could do. How is it that on this one particular point he is so strange?" Did not such men at times think that there must be something in it after all? If they did not think so, at any rate the fact that Noah carried out his principles to the full, and invested all he had in the building of this strange ark, would have forced them to conviction if they had not been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. How his faith condemned them! When the floods began to rise, and the door was shut, how the sight of the ark condemned them! I can imagine, when the water began to get knee-deep, there would be frightened ones around the ark door; but it could not be opened, since God had shut it. When the ark began to float, some of them fled to the sides of the mountains; and what a condemnation the sight of the floating ark was to them! Noah could not help them then. The day in which they might have entered was gone by. If they ever saw Noah look out of the ark, how the face which once pleaded with them would condemn them! Oh, my hearers, how often have I warned you to flee from the wrath to come! I have warned you of those dread waves of fire, and of that horrible tempest, which will sweep over all the earth, and destroy ungodly men and their works.

How often have I spoken of the pit which God hath digged for the wicked, into which your feet will slide in due time unless you seek the Saviour! May be, in those days of terror, the face of the preacher will condemn you, as you remember how he looked at you with earnest love, but you would have none of his pleading, and chose to perish in your sin. Your blood shall be upon your own heads. It is a solemn thought, that one lone man condemned a world. It was one against millions! Yet the one condemned the millions. If God is with a man, though that man be only one, he is in the majority. Men of the world will soon become a weeping, wailing, and despairing company; but he that stands alone for God shall be had in honour, and shall both judge and condemn the guilty world.

The last thing Noah earned by his faith was this, *he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith;* for God said of him, when he bade him come into the ark, "Thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." God declared him righteous; not righteous by his works, although his works, following upon his faith, proved him to be righteous; but righteous by his faith. He believed God, and found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He received the righteousness which God gives through Jesus Christ to all them that believe. Wrapt in this he stood before the Lord, justified and approved. By faith he was adopted and became a son, an heir. For him the promise of the woman's seed, though it was all the Bible that he had, was quite enough. The woman's seed, and the Lamb's sacrifice, which Abel had seen, these were almost all the revelation he had known. He had no Pentateuch, no Psalms, no Gospels, no Epistles; but he so believed that little Bible of his, that he expected that Christ in him would bruise the serpent in the world. God honoured his faith, and he condemned the world. He lived when the rest perished; he was secure in his ark when the myriads were sinking in the deluge: he became "heir of the righteousness which is by faith" when others were condemned. May God make us all so, and unto his name shall be the glory through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis vi. 5—22; Hebrews xi. 1—7.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—913, 652, 504.

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THE TENDERNESS OF JESUS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 8TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."—Hebrews iv. 15.

BELOVED, we have *a High Priest.* All that Israel had under the law we still retain; only we have the substance, of which they had only the shadow. "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle": we have a sacrifice, which, being once offered, for ever avails; we have "one greater than the temple," and he is to us the mercy-seat and the High Priest. Take it for granted that all the blessings of the law remain under the gospel. Christ has restored that which he took not away; but he has not taken away one single possible blessing of the law; on the contrary, he has secured all to his people. I look to the Old Testament, and I see certain blessings appended to the covenant of works, and I say to myself by faith, "Those blessings are mine, for I have kept the covenant of works in the person of my Covenant Head and Surety. Every blessing which is promised to perfect obedience belongs to me, since I present to God a perfect obedience in the person of my great Representative, the Lord Jesus Christ." Every real spiritual boon which Israel had, you have as a Christian.

Note, next, not only do we read that there is a High Priest, but in the fourteenth verse we read, "*We have* a high priest." It would be a small matter to us to know that such and such blessings existed; the great point is to know by faith that we personally possess them. What is the great High Priest to me unless he is mine? What is a Saviour but a word to tantalize my despairing spirit, until I can say that this Saviour is mine? Every blessing of the covenant is prized in proportion as it is *had:* "We have a High Priest." I pray you, never talk of the blessings and doctrines of grace as matters apart from personal possession, but seek habitually to enjoy and experience them. That was a grand exclamation of Thomas, "My Lord, and my God"; and this is a sweet word for the saints—"We have a High Priest." Beloved, come boldly to the throne, for you have a High Priest. Grasp

firmly by faith the choice favours which your interest in the Lord Jesus secures to you.

It is precious to reflect that Jesus, as High Priest, is still ours, though, according to the text, he "*is passed into the heavens.*" He does not forget us now that he has passed through the lower heavens into the heaven of heavens, where he reigns supreme in his Father's glory. He is still touched with a feeling of our infirmities. Though he has left behind him all pain, and suffering, and infirmity, he retains to the full the fellow-feeling which his life of humiliation has developed in him. "The man is near of kin unto us," and no difference of situation or condition has changed his kinship, or the boundless love which goes with it. Our Joseph, though Lord of all Egypt, is our brother still; and beneath the vestments of a king, there beats the heart of love. Think of our High Priest as not having laid aside that breastplate of his on which our names are enjewelled, nor the "two onyx stones, set in ouches of gold," which he wore upon his shoulders, inscribed in the self-same manner. On his heart and on his shoulder our exalted High Priest bears all his people: his heart and his arm are both engaged for them: his love and his power are engrossed by them. Our Lord carries in his pierced hands, and feet, and side, the memorials of his redeemed, as it is written, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." We have in him who has passed into the heavens as truly merciful a High Priest as if he were still on this side the veil, ministering as in the day of his humiliation.

Put those things together, and read them experimentally, each believer for himself. We have a High Priest: we have him now; and while he is beyond the heavens, in the glory of glories, he is still ours, in all tenderness exercising his grace and power towards us.

Observe here that the apostle delights to dwell upon the majesty and glory of our High Priest. What does he say? "Seeing then that we have a *great* High Priest," as if Aaron and all his sons were little personages compared with him. In Jesus, the Son of God, we have "a great High Priest." The long succeeding line of priests called of God to stand before him in the holy place on earth, have all passed away; but we have "a great High Priest," seeing he never dies. These men were all faulty; but we have a "great High Priest," who is absolutely perfect. These men did but humbly represent him, as in a dew-drop the sun may be reflected; but he is the true High Priest between God and man, and therefore the epithet "*great*" is put before his name as it could not be before any other.

He is "the great High Priest," for he has passed, not within a material veil into some inner sanctuary encompassed with curtains, but into the heavens, where God dwelleth. His name is *Jesus*. There is his manhood: he was born of a woman to save his people from their sins. But we read further, "Jesus, *the Son of God*." There is his Deity. He is the Only-begotten of the Father: as glorious in his Godhead as he is gracious in his manhood.

Paul delights to dwell upon these points of glory. But when he has done so, it seems to occur to him that when we consider the greatness of our High Priest some poor trembling sinners may be afraid to draw nigh to him; and the apostle ever has a longing eye towards

drawing souls to Jesus. Therefore, he falls back upon our Lord's tenderness. Great as he is, our High Priest is not one who "cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He puts a negative on that fear which might naturally arise in trembling bosoms. This morning, being myself more than usually compassed with infirmities, I desire to speak, as a weak and suffering preacher, of that High Priest who is full of compassion: and my longing is that any who are low in spirit, faint, despondent, and even out of the way, may take heart to approach the Lord Jesus. Let no man be afraid of him who is the embodiment of gentleness and compassion. Though conscious of your own infirmities, you may feel free to come to him, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. I want to speak so tenderly that even the despairing may look up, and may feel a drawing towards our beloved Master who is so graciously touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

I. So I am going to begin my sermon by saying of our blessed Lord, HE HAS ASSUMED A VERY TENDER OFFICE. If the office of high priest had been fully carried out, as it ought to have been, it would have been one of the most tenderly helpful that could have been devised. A king may render great aid to the unhappy; but, on the other hand, he is a terror to evil-doers: a high priest is in the highest sense "ordained for men," and he is the friend and succourer of the most wretched.

It was intended, first, that *by the high priest God should commune with men.* That needs a person of great tenderness. A mind that is capable of listening to God, and understanding, in a measure, what he teaches, had need be very tender, so as to interpret the lofty sense into the lowly language of humanity. If the man is to come from among the infinites down to the ignorance and narrow capacities of mortal men, he had need be tender as a nurse to her children. Great philosophers have not always been great teachers: their very profundity has prevented their translating their great thoughts into the speech of common minds. There is a possibility of knowing so much that the knowledge becomes crowded up, and there remains no possible gate for the orderly going out of such a multitude of thoughts. Great knowledge needs great patience if it would instruct the ignorant. The great loaves of wisdom must be broken, and crumbed into a basin of milk for the children. How few remember the words, "Let the children first be filled"! Now, the High Priest had to be a man who could commune with God, and hearken to the sacred oracle; and then he was bound to come out to commonplace-men of the wilderness, or men of the farm, and tell them what he had heard in secret from the infinite God. He must mediate, and allow his mouth to be God's mouth to the people—for "the priest's lips should keep knowledge." What he had grasped from the Lord he must so put that the people could grasp it and act upon it. This is what our Lord has done in the tenderest manner. He reveals the Father. The things of God which he knoweth he makes known unto us by his Holy Spirit, as we are able to bear them. We are to learn of him. Some say that they will go from nature up to nature's God; they will do no such thing—the steps are much too

steep for their feeble climbing; they fall into some such abyss of absurdity as evolution, and come not nigh to God. You have not to go from Jesus Christ to God, for he himself is God. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him." Come, then, and learn of the great High Priest. His office itself is a compassionate one, and you may learn all of God from him the more readily because he is meek and lowly of heart, and will count it no drudgery to teach you the very A B C of divine truth.

But a high priest took the other side also: *he was to communicate with God from men.* Here, also, he needed the tenderest spirit to rule his faculties and to move his affections. He must needs sit down and hear all the trembling petitions of troubled mothers who had come from the utmost end of Israel laden with their domestic burdens; he must listen to all the complaints of the oppressed, the woes of the afflicted, the trials of the poor, the perplexities of the distracted; and then, as a man of God, he was ordained to take all these things in prayer before the Most High, and in fitter language to present the requests of the broken in heart. What a tender office! How few could carry it out! Even some well-meaning ministers do not seem able to enter into the struggles of a seeking sinner, or into the conflicts of a tempted soul. Those who go to them that they may enjoy their intercessions are disappointed. Our High Priest is quite at home with mourners, and enters into their case as a good physician understands the symptoms of his patients. When we tell our Lord the story of our inward grief, he understands it better than we do. He rightly reads our case, and then wisely presents it before the Majesty on high, pleading his sacrifice, that the Lord may deal graciously with us. Beloved, this is what Jesus Christ will do for all who desire to speak with God. He is the "Interpreter, one of a thousand," by whom our sighs will be reported to heaven. If you wish to communicate your needs to the great Father, who is able to help in time of need, here is the ambassador between earth and heaven who can plead the cause of your soul at that throne from which succour ever comes. Is it not gracious on our Lord's part to undertake so tender an office for those who need it so greatly, and have no other way of access to the God of grace?

But if I understand the high priest's office aright, he had many things to do which come under this general description, but which might not suggest themselves, if you did not have the items set before you. The high priest was one who had *to deal with sin and judgment for the people.* We read in Exodus xxviii. 29, "Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually." In consequence, he was called upon to hear confessions of sin, and pleadings for pardon. Many came to him and acknowledged known transgressions, or wished for aid in discovering sins of ignorance. As God's representative, he judged the errors of those who came to offer sacrifice for their sins, and helped them to deal rightly in the things of God. This is a very tender post to occupy. No mere man is fitted to hear, as a rule, the confessions of all sorts of people, and certainly, he should not seek to do so. Yet the man whom God calls to feed his flock is forced, at times, to enter into the

soul-conflicts of his fellow-men, and to hear the mournful story of their wanderings; and he needs great tenderness in so doing. We have a High Priest into whose ear we may pour all the confessions of our penitence without fear. Go and do so. It is a wonderful easement to the mind to tell Jesus all. Men who have consciences that tear them to pieces will find perfect repose follow upon a full pouring out of their soul before the Lord Jesus. Our merciful High Priest will never make a harsh observation, nor ask a rasping question, nor pronounce a crushing sentence. Go to him only, for there is none like him. He will come so near to you, that you shall unburden your soul at his feet.

No doubt the high priest was resorted to, *that he might console the sorrowful.* It must have been a great relief for those who were of a sorrowful spirit, to go unto the sanctuary of the Lord, and sit at the feet of a man of God, who could remind the stricken one of the promises made to meet such sorrow. Only to tell the story was helpful. Mourners often get more comfort from telling their griefs than they do from the remarks of those to whom they unbosom themselves. Go to Jesus, dear friend, if a sharp grief is now gnawing at your heart. If it be a trouble which you could not tell to your father or your husband, go to Jesus with it. That holy woman, Hannah, when she sat in the court of the Lord's house, got but little at first from Eli: she was telling her Lord her secret, and the aged priest thought that she was drunken, because her lips were moving, and she spake not aloud. He rebuked her roughly. But when she explained herself, then he bade her go in peace, for her prayer would be granted her; and she went away no more sad. Jesus will make no mistake as to your meaning, dear friend, even though you should be as one drunken with sorrow. Go to your chamber all alone, tell Jesus your trouble, and he will meet it in the fulness of his compassion and wisdom. Through him the Comforter shall come to you, and your sorrow shall be turned into joy. Try it. I cannot preach to you this morning with any power of words; but words are not wanted if you will put everything to the test which I tell you concerning the tender-hearted Saviour. Hasten to lay Rabshakeh's letter before your Lord. Pour out the wormwood and the gall before him: he knows their bitterness, and he will surely make them to be swallowed up in victory. This is the purpose of his office, and he will not fail therein.

The high priest would hear, also, *the desires and wishes of the people.* When men in Israel had some great longing, some overwhelming desire, they not only prayed in private, but they would make a journey up to the temple to ask the high priest to present their petitions before the Lord. Hannah only told Eli her heart's longing after it had been gratified; for she could not have summoned courage to mention so special a desire to a man who had so harshly judged her. She had evidently gone to Shiloh to make petition for a child, since her husband's other wife had been cruel to her because of her barrenness. She told Eli that the Lord had heard her, and then she consulted him as to the dedication of her son to the Lord. My friend, you may have some very peculiar, delicate desire as to spiritual things that only God and your own soul may know; but fear not to mention it to your tender High Priest, who will know your meaning, and deal graciously with you.

It was the high priest's business *to instruct and to reprove the people.* To instruct is delightful; but to reprove is difficult. Only a tender spirit can wisely utter rebuke. Israel's high priest needed to be meek as Moses in his rebukes of the erring. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us our faults in tones of love. His rebukes never break the heart. He never upbraids in bitterness, though he does so in faithfulness. Oh, the tenderness of Christ! I feel my subject deeply, but I cannot speak it as I would. He has been most gracious in correcting me. I know his word is true: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." We can take anything from Jesus: his hands make the bitter sweet. There are men whom you would shun in the hour of your wounding, even though you believe that they would do their best to help you; for you do not feel that you could reveal your heart to them, nor feel happy to be under obligation to them. Their kindness is hard and cold; their counsel is without the sweetening of fellow-feeling. They are as keen as a sword, and as cutting. It may be, they are so much above us that we cannot reach up to them, nor expect them to reach down to us. But there are other men, blessed among their fellows, who seem to be like havens for ships: you rejoice to cast anchor under their lee. You feel, "I could tell that man anything. I know that he would have patience with me, and pity for me, and that his heart would go out towards me." Now, beloved, you will often be disappointed if you select a man or woman to be your confidante; but if you will resort to the Lord Jesus, whom God has commissioned to be a High Priest for this very end and purpose, you will find him just the friend you need. He loves the troubled, for "in all their affliction he was afflicted." He is very careful of the feeble-minded, and of the little ones; for is it not written—"He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young"? When circumstances are peculiarly trying, Jesus is peculiarly tender. When we are grieved, he is gentle. Did you ever hear any of his people say of their Lord, that he is overbearing? Did his spouse, in the song, ever say that her Beloved had a rough side to his hand, or a cold place in his heart? He can and does chide, for his love is wise; but he is very pitiful, and his love knows no limit. His heart is made of tenderness, and his soul melteth for love of his chosen. We adore our High Priest, not only for the greatness of his merit, but for the sweetness of his mercy.

I wish I could fitly speak of him. But this much I must and will say—Come to him, and rest in him; for he calls you. He is near at all times, and in all places, and you can come to him while you sit in the pew, or when you walk by the way. Come, ye that labour and are heavy laden, and lay your burdens at his feet. Come, ye whose souls sink down within you under a sense of sin, come to him who, as your great High Priest, has offered a guilt-removing sacrifice. He sits at the door of the house of mercy: he waiteth to be gracious. This is my first head.

II. Now, secondly, as our Lord Jesus has a tender office, so, next, HE HAS A TENDER FEELING. "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Note that it is not said, "touched *by*," but touched *with*. Many a man can be touched

by the sorrow of another, but he is not touched *with* that sorrow. He has feeling, but not fellow-feeling. He pities the sorrowing, but he does not sorrow with them. How many of the rich are sorry for the poor; but they were never poor themselves, so they may be touched *by* the woe of poverty, but they are not touched *with* a fellow-feeling for it. Our Lord is touched *with* a feeling of our infirmities. You are touched, and he is touched, at the same time. A pang shoots through my heart: that pang has been felt by my Lord also. A grief has stirred the waters of my spirit, and the spirit of the great High Priest has moved in harmony therewith. They say, but I know not that it is true, that when the strings of one harp are touched, if there be another harp in the room, it gently responds in unison, though not touched by any hand; assuredly it is so with the believer and his Lord. Touch any one of his members, and you touch the Head of the spiritual body. Your present trouble is upon the heart of the Well-beloved.

"He, in his measure, feels afresh
What every member bears."

It is not merely true that he is apprised of our infirmities, since the Lord has said, "I know their sorrows"; but he "is touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Hold that thought! It is a great matter that our God should note the trials of his people, that his condescending omniscience should concern itself with their every-day distresses; but this word goes further: he feels with his people: is "touched with the *feeling* of our infirmities." The sense of feeling is more intense, vivid, and acute than the sense of sight. It is one thing to see pain, but another thing to be touched with the feeling of it. Treasure up this view of your Lord's sympathy, for it may be a great support in the hour of agony, and a grand restorative in the day of weakness.

Note again, "The feeling of *our* infirmities." Whose infirmities? Does not "our" mean yours and mine? Jesus is touched with the feeling of your infirmities and mine. You, my venerable brother, and you, my younger sister; you who have come hither from a new-made grave, and you that will return to a bed shortly to be emptied of your dearest one; you that are slandered, and you that are sick; you that can scarce hold up your head for sadness, and you that are distracted with fear: he is "touched with a feeling of our infirmities." I do not know how you feel it, but the text draws me very near to all of you who are under infirmities even as I am. We nestle together in that little word, "our." We meet in the hospital ward of that other word, "infirmities." The best of all is, that Jesus meets us all there, and is touched with the feeling of the infirmities, not only of renowned divines in their pulpits, and of great saints in their closets, but with "our" infirmities—even ours, who are "less than the least of all saints."

Note well that word "infirmities"—"touched with the feeling of our *infirmities*." If it had only said sorrows, there would have been a sound of the sublime about it; but he stoops to "infirmities." He is not only touched with the feeling of the heroic endurance of the martyrs, but he sympathizes with those of you who are no heroes, but can only plead, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

While you are entreating the Lord thrice to take away the thorn in the flesh he is sympathizing with you. Is it not well that it does not say, touched with the feeling of our patience? our self-denial, our valour? but "with a feeling of our infirmities"; that is, our weakness, our littleness, the points in which we are not strong nor happy. Our pain, our depression, our trembling, our sensitiveness; he is touched with these, though he falls not into the sin which too often comes of them. Hold fast this truth, for it may greatly tend to your consolation another day. Jesus is touched, not with a feeling of your strength, but of your infirmity. Down here, poor, feeble nothings affect the heart of their great High Priest on high, who is crowned with glory and honour. As the mother feels with the weakness of her babe, so does Jesus feel with the poorest, saddest, and weakest of his chosen.

How comes this about, brethren? Let us think of it a while! *Our Lord has a tender nature.* Some people are not sympathetic, and never will be; their spirit is not generous. We are all made of clay; but some clay is stiffer and more gritty than another; and very hard grit it is in some cases. Some men have no more feeling than granite. They will say about the collection to-day, "I shall not give anything to the hospitals. Let the people take care of themselves. If they were more thrifty they would have a little laid by for a rainy day, and would not need to have hospitals provided for them." This gentleman can supply wagon-loads of the same sort of hard material. I know you, my friend, I have known you, too, a long time. I was going to say, "I would be happy to attend your funeral"; but I will not say so, lest it seem that I am hardening myself under your influence; and besides, there are so many of your order, that one more or less is of no great consequence. You know the people who are always grizzling against charity, and finding a shilling's-worth of reasons why they should not give a penny. Such people will not willingly put anything into the box: but as it will come round to them, possibly they will do so for fear of being known. Jesus our Lord is tender by nature. Amid the bliss of heaven he foresaw the miseries of earth, and resolved to leave his glory that he might come here to rescue man. His innate tenderness brought him from the throne to the manger, from the manger to the cross.

Our Lord is not only tender of nature, but *quick of understanding as to the infirmities of men.* Want of sense often prevents men being sensitive and sympathetic. If you have never suffered under disease, you need a little imagination to realize it, so as to be touched with the feeling of it. I noticed a very able address delivered by Mr. Hutchinson before the Lord Mayor last Friday, in which he advises a person who mourns his lack of sympathy to go for a week to his usual city vocation with a black patch over one eye, or wearing a wooden leg. "If this does not effect the business," he says, "let him choose some leisure day in the country in bright spring, and resolutely for twenty-four hours keep a bandage firmly placed over both eyes. His organization is, I fear, in this direction, well-nigh hopeless, if next morning he does not feel inclined to send a liberal donation to some hospital, that has for its mission the prevention of blindness." I have no doubt that

improvable persons might be all the better for some such attempt to gain fellow-feeling. The same doctor thinks that the wearing of a truss, or a spinal apparatus, for one day might be a help to tenderness. I will not urge these modes of cure; but the principle is good, and it might be tried in other directions. Suppose the squire of the parish, who thinks ten or twelve shillings abundant wages for a week, should say to his lady, "We have always said that our agricultural labourers have quite enough money to live upon; let us try their fare. We will leave this house for a week and take one of the old cottages in the village; and live, all of us, on the wage we pay our men." What a capital school for social economy! How well would some people know the value of our silver currency, and of the copper coinage also! Only we should like members of parliament to have a longer experience than one week, lest it might be a pleasant change from feasting to fasting. Say six months for the honourable member! This might foster sympathy. Our blessed Lord had real experience; and, beside that, the faculty of being able to put himself into the place of sufferers, and so to be "acquainted with grief." His quick understanding made him realize, as High Priest, the sorrows of his people.

Too many people are so *wrapped up in their own grief* that they have no room in their souls for sympathy. Do you not know them? The first thing when they rise in the morning, is the dreadful story of the night they have passed. Ah, dear! and they have not quite eaten a hearty breakfast, before their usual pain is somewhere or other coming over them. They must have the special care and pity of the whole household. All the day long the one great business is to keep everybody aware of how much the great sufferer is enduring. It is this person's patent right to monopolize all the sympathy which the market can supply, and then there will be none to spare for the rest of the afflicted. If you are greatly taken up with self, there is not enough of you to run over to anybody else. How different this from our Lord, who never cried, "Have pity upon me! Have pity upon me, O my friends!" He is described as "enduring the cross, despising the shame." So strong was he in love, that, though he saved others, himself he could not save; though he succoured the afflicted, none succoured him.

Men who are *wrapped up in their own glories are not sympathetic.* Is it not a fine thing to spend life in contemplating one's own magnificence? Those who are amazed at their own greatness have no thought to spare for the suffering. "No," says the man, "the masses must obey the laws of supply and demand, and get on as well as they can. Let them do as I have done. I might have been as poor as they are, if I had shown as little push and enterprise as they do." The gentleman talks on a great scale, and he has no sympathy for the small woes of common life. His sympathy is wanted at home; and his charity begins there, and is so satisfied with its beginning that it never goes any further. Our Lord is at the opposite pole from all this. He never glorified himself: he "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant"; thus displaying the tenderness of his heart.

Let me say, once more, our Lord is tender to us without any effort;

not only because of the reasons I have mentioned, but because *he has made our cause his own.* We are his friends; and does not a friend act tenderly to a friend? We are more than that, we are married to him; and shall not a husband be tender to his spouse? More than that, "we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones"; and shall not the head feel every pain of the members? It must be so. Jesus has so identified himself with his own redeemed, that he must evermore be in living, loving, lasting sympathy with them.

III. I must now notice very briefly, in the third place, that OUR LORD HAD A TENDER TRAINING. Hear what he says of it. He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Beloved, *our Lord was tried as we are;* that is one meaning of the passage. As to all manner of *bodily* ills, he was subject to them all. Hungry, weary, faint, without a place whereon to lay his head, he was tried in all the points to which poverty exposes its victims. "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." Even to the death-sweat and the cry, "I thirst!" Jesus has gone along our pathway of pain and grief. No step of it has been spared him.

Our Lord has been tried *mentally.* There is never an exceeding heaviness, nor a sore amazement, nor a wound of treachery, nor a stab of ingratitude, of which he did not feel the like. The sharpest arrows in the quiver of anguish have been shot at his dear heart. "Oh," says one, "I do not think anybody has been tried as I have been by cruel unkindness." Say not so, for Jesus was forsaken of all, and betrayed by the friend in whom he trusted.

As to *spiritual* distress, our Lord has been there also. Where any sinless foot could go, he has gone. The abyss has heard him cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Tried in all points from above and from below, from without and from within, he can sympathize with every form of tribulation.

"Like as we are." Who are meant by the "we"? That again is like the "our": it means you and me. Jesus Christ passed through a training similar to ours. The discipline of life for all the children is much the same. The first-born is tried as the rest of the household are tried.

But the text says, "*tempted,*" and that bears a darker meaning than "tried." Our Lord could never have fallen the victim of temptation, but through life he was the object of it. He could never have been so tempted as that the sin of a temptation could spot his soul. Far from it. Yet remember that in the wilderness he was tempted to *unbelief.* The evil one said, "If thou be the Son of God." Most of us know how he can hiss that "if" into our ear. "If thou be the Son of God." Upon our Lord that "if" fell painfully but harmlessly. Then came the temptation to help himself and anticipate the providence of God by selfish action: "Command that these stones be made bread." We, too, have had this rash act suggested to us. The tempter has said, "You could get out of your difficulties by doing a wrong thing—do it. It is not a very wrong thing either; indeed, it is questionable whether it might not be justifiable under the circumstances. In vain will you wait for the Lord; put out your own hand and provide for yourself. The way of faith in God is slow, and you

are in pressing need." Our Lord came just there. When no bread in the house is made the background of a great temptation, remember that our Lord has undergone the counterpart of that temptation.

Next, the Lord Jesus was tempted to *presumption*. Set on the pinnacle of the temple, he heard a voice saying, "If thou be the Son of God cast thyself down from hence: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee." Are you haunted by a similar suggestion to presume? Is it suggested that you quit your old standing and try the new notions, or that you speculate in business, or that you profess to understand what God has never taught you? Resist earnestly. Ah, dear friends! your Lord knows all about this, and as he escaped that temptation, you shall do the same.

Then the fiend—how often I have wondered at him!—dared to say to Christ, "All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Picture the Lord of angels, with all the royalty of heaven shining on his brow, and the black fiend daring to say, "Fall down and worship *me*." It may be that a like temptation is coming home to you: live for gold, live for fame, live for pleasure: in some form or other, worship the devil and renounce faith in God. "Worship me," says the prince of evil: "take to the new doctrines, practise the current worldlinesses, leave the Word of God for the wisdom of the philosophers": in some such form will the temptation come; but even though the fiend could fulfil his promise, and all the world should be ours, we are bound to resist unto the death, and we are encouraged to do so by the fact that we are upon the old ground where our Redeemer fought and conquered. He can enter into the distress which this temptation is causing you; for he has felt the same. How the Lord Jesus must have started back with horror from the suggestions of the devil! He never entertained them for an instant; but the mere passing of those temptations over the drum of his ear, and the apprehension of his mind, must have caused him the sharpest wounding; for he hated sin with immeasurable hate.

Beloved, our Lord has endured so much of temptation that He will be tender towards you this morning, "touched with the feeling of your infirmities," because tempted at all points as you are. Even though temptation follows you as the serpent which biteth at the horses' heels, your Lord knows it and will deliver you.

IV. I am happy to come to my last point, through divine aid. OUR LORD HAS A TENDER PERFECTNESS. As I read the verse—"In all points tempted like as we are, *yet without sin*," I thought I heard you say, "But that is just the pinch of the matter. He cannot sympathize with me in sin, and that is my great trouble." Brother, do you wish that your Lord had become a sinner like yourself? Abhor the idea! It would be blasphemy if understood and indulged. You see at once that you could not wish anything of the kind. But listen to me; do not imagine that if the Lord Jesus had sinned he would have been any more tender toward you; for *sin is always of a hardening nature*. If the Christ of God could have sinned, he would have lost the perfection of his sympathetic nature. It needs perfectness of heart to lay self all aside, and to be touched with a feeling of the infirmities of others.

Hearken again: do you not think that *sympathy in sin would be a*

poisonous sweet? A child, for instance, has done wrong, and he has been wisely chastened by his father; I have known cases in which a foolish mother has sympathized with the child. This may seem affectionate, but it is wickedly injurious to the child. Such conduct would lead the child to love the evil which it is needful he should hate. Have you not felt yourself that, in unbelieving moments, it would have been a great evil for a Christian brother to have petted you in your unbelief; and that it was far better for you to have heard a bracing word of upbraiding? We ought not to wish for sympathy in wrong. Sympathy in sin is conspiracy in crime. We must show sympathy with sinners, but not with their sins. If, then, you dream that our Lord Jesus would have derived any gracious power to sympathize with us from himself sinning, you greatly err. Such sympathy, had it been possible, would have been to the last degree injurious to us. Inasmuch as he had no sin, we can drink in his words of comfort without fear. His oil and wine will bring no evil to our wounds. His holy experience comforts us, and runs us into no risk. It is a blessed thing for a sinner to have the sympathies of one who never sinned. Rejoice, ye people of God; rejoice in this, that the sinless One has perfect sympathy with you in your infirmities. He sympathizes all the more graciously because he is without sin.

I have done when I have said this—if our Lord was thus sympathetic, let us be tender to our fellow-men. Let us not restrain our tenderer feelings, but encourage them. Love is the brightest of the graces, and most sweetly adorns the gospel. Love to the sorrowing, the suffering, the needy, is a charming flower, which grows in the garden of a renewed heart. Cultivate it! Make your love practical! Love the poor, not in word only, but in actual gifts to them! Love the sick, and help them to a cure! To-day I cannot conceive of you as thinking of the sick poor of London without wishing that you could house them all, relieve them all with medical skill, and then send them for a little into the country, or by the seaside, to gather strength. It is a painful fact that our great hospitals have so many beds unoccupied, while patients are in need of them! As a governor of St. Thomas's Hospital, I have seen, from time to time, how the endowments have decreased in value through the agricultural depression and the lowering of rents. Surely London is rich enough to make up the deficit of £100,000. To do this the collections must be, at least, doubled. Will you allow the poor to pine in their narrow rooms? Shall they perish for lack of surgical care and medical help? Do you call yourselves followers of the tender Jesus? Do you hope to be saved through his compassion? On this Hospital Sunday I charge rich Christians to delay no longer, but to be touched with the feeling of the sufferings of those who are made of one flesh with them. Let all of us do our best. I will not insult you by pleading with you as though you were unwilling. You are eager to give for his dear sake who sympathizes with you so tenderly, and helps you so graciously. Let the collection be made at once.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Heb. iv. 14–16; v. 1–14.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—306, 328, 326.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

EVERLASTING LOVE REVEALED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 15TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."—Jeremiah xxxi. 3.

THUS speaks the Israel of God. She seems to wake up as if she had long been asleep, and had forgotten a grand fact—a fact which she ought to have treasured up in her fondest memory. Suddenly startling into recollection, she cries, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." How strange that she should have forgotten it! Her spiritual lethargy had dimmed her memory, and caused her to feel and act as if it were not true, as if her God had never revealed himself to her. Then she saw with amazement that, notwithstanding all the heavy chastisement which the Lord had sent her, and notwithstanding all her backslidings, there was still a hope of mercy, nay, there was the certainty of it; for the unchanging God had said, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Are any of you forgetful or unaware of the sacred truth? Has it never occurred to you that God has spoken to his people? Though you are a child of God, have you been taken up with so many inferior things that you have let go the blessed memory of former appearances of the Lord to your soul? May the Holy Spirit arouse you at this time! May there come a blessed awakening hour to your drowsy spirits!

This startling remembrance came to Israel at a time when her sorrows were very great, and her sins were greater still. She had been wounded, so that she was sick and sore; and she found no healing medicine, and none to bind up her wounds. In her distress she remembered, not only her faults, but also the former lovingkindnesses of her Lord. She gathered from that ancient assurance of grace that her God loved her still, and would return to her in great mercy. She dwelt with hope upon that divine assurance of irrevocable favour: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." When earthly joys ebb out, it is a blessed thing if they make room for memories of heavenly visitations and gracious assurances. When you are at your lowest, it may happen that then the God of all grace comes in, and

brings to your remembrance the love of your espousals, and the joy of former days, when the candle of the Lord shone round about you.

At the same time, it was not merely a time of inward sorrow, but a period of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; for Jehovah was speaking in tones of sovereign grace, and pouring forth great rivers of promises, and seas of mercy. See the first verse: "At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people." Sometimes you pour water down a dry pump, and that sets it working so that it pours forth streams of its own; and so, when our gracious God pours in his love into the soul, our own love begins to flow, and with it memory awakes, and a thousand recollections cause us to bring to mind the ancient love wherein we aforetime delighted, and we cry, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." It only wants a touch, this morning, of that pierced hand to make our hard hearts soft. If our divine Lord will only come by his Spirit and visit us as we sit in these pews, the waters of love will flow within, until the wilderness shall become a pool, and the dry land springs of water. Long may we have suffered a great decay of spiritual life, but we shall on a sudden be restored, and then our hearts will burn and glow with holy attachment to him whose love has not changed, though we have so sadly fallen. God grant it may be so! May a renewed appearing of the Lord revive our joy in his appearing of old! While you are sitting there, listening to my words, may a still small voice be heard within your souls, melting your hearts, and causing you to say, "Yes, I had almost forgotten it, but 'The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'"

May the grand discovery of everlasting love be made by many of you for the first time in your lives! Oh, for the surprises of Almighty grace! As when one in ploughing stumbles on treasure hid in a field, and rejoices exceedingly, even so may you rejoice in new-discovered love! Or if you know it already, may you feel its drawings for the thousandth time, and they will be to you still fresh and new, as though you had never felt them before. The visits of God's grace, and the discoveries of his love to our hearts, never grow stale. We can go over this heavenly ground again and again, and always behold new glories in it. May an overpowering memory of the Lord's love come over us all at this time, by the power of the Holy Ghost!

I shall handle the text, first, by calling your attention to *the marvellous appearing*—"The Lord hath appeared of old unto me"; secondly, to *the matchless declaration*—"Saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love"; and thirdly, to *the manifest evidence of this love*—"Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." May the Holy Spirit be poured forth, anointing every word I speak with divine unction, and may this discourse be precious to his people!

I. First, consider THE MARVELLOUS APPEARING: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me."

Here are two persons; but how different in degree! Here we have "*me*," a good-for-nothing creature, apt to forget my Lord, and to live as if there were no God; yet he has not ignored or neglected *me*. There is *the High and Holy One*, whom the heaven of heavens cannot

contain, and he has appeared unto me. Between me and the great Jehovah there have been communications; the solitary silences have been broken: "The Lord hath appeared," hath appeared "unto me." He has looked through the window; he has shown himself through the lattices: "The Lord hath appeared." Hundreds in this house of prayer can each one say, without doubt or hesitation, "The Lord hath appeared unto me." Perhaps of late the Lord has manifested himself to you as he doth not unto the world; and even if it has not been so just now, yet there was a happy time, now in the old long ago, when you saw the Lord. This is a very wonderful thing, that Jehovah the eternal should reveal himself to the creature of an hour: that the thrice Holy should speak to the greatly guilty! See, here we have "the Lord" and "me"; and between these two this is the golden link, an appearance in infinite love: "The Lord hath appeared unto me." That the All-glorious should put in an appearance amongst his angels, and unveil himself to Cherubim and Seraphim, I can more easily understand; but it is incomprehensible that the Creator of the ends of the earth, of whose understanding there is no searching, should visit me, a sinful child of man! Yet this which surpasses understanding is undoubtedly true. My brethren, we have enjoyed the supernatural; we have risen out of the region of materialism into the spirit-realm, where God dwells and condescends to commune with mortal men. We can say, "The Lord hath appeared unto me." It was needful that he should do so; for nothing but his appearing could have scattered our darkness, removed our death, and brought us salvation. It needed that he should appear; for nothing but a vision of his love could have won our hearts for himself, and delivered them from the fascinations of this present evil world. Tell it out among the sceptics and the earth-worms. "The Lord hath appeared unto me." I care not who questions it, for the results of his gracious visit are in my nature and my life. The event is recorded in the diary of my memory in indelible ink; but it is also written in my soul, and the experience of every day deepens the inscription. Is not this even as the Lord promised of old, "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them"?

Do I hear some asking, How is this? I understand that God appeared to Israel, but how to me? Let me picture the discovery of grace as it comes to the awakening mind, when it learns to sit at the feet of Jesus, saved by faith in the great sacrifice. Touched by the Spirit of God, we find that the Lord appeared to each one of us *in the promises of his Word*. Every promise in God's Word is a promise to every believer, or to every character such as that to which it was first given. When God said this or that to the saints of old, my soul, he said it to thee! I read the word as first spoken to Abraham, Moses, or David; but in very deed each utterance is for me. What a discovery! This book is God's letter of love *to me!* No promise of the Word of God is for one individual only. Though the promise was whispered in one ear at the first, that one favoured person was the representative of all who have like faith. With what delight you will now read your Bibles, when you can see that in them the Lord hath appeared of old unto you, and spoken words of love to you personally!

Does the Word of God speak to believers? I am a believer; and therefore it speaks to me. Does the Word speak to praying men and women? I pray: it speaks to me. The richest word in all that Book is as much the inheritance of the believer to-day as it was the heritage of David, and we may find the words of the Lord and eat them as the bread of our souls, as Jeremiah did; for, in this sacred Book, "The Lord has appeared of old" to each one of his believing family.

Furthermore, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me," *in the person of his Son.* God came to each believer in Christ Jesus. God came in boundless love to each one of us as "Immanuel, God with us." Towards each one of us, he "took upon him the form of a servant, and humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Listen, my heart! In his manhood and humiliation the Lord God appeared to thee. On the Cross thy Lord Jesus showed himself to thee in love. Now thou hast found it out, is it not a glorious discovery? It was not only for the innumerable multitude that Jesus died; but for thee, my soul, for thee! I wish, beloved, we could evermore look upon Jesus as God's embodied love to us—to us in particular. Will you take a faith-view of Jesus at this time as dying for sinners, and for you as a sinner in particular? Say "Yes, eighteen hundred years ago and more, the Lord in the person of his dear Son appeared unto me in Gethsemane, and on Calvary as my Lord, and my God, and yet my substitute and Saviour."

Since that, the Lord has constantly appeared unto us *in the power of his Holy Spirit.* Do you remember when first your sin was set in order before your tearful eyes, and you trembled for fear of the justice which you had provoked? Do you remember when you heard the story of the Crucified Redeemer? when you saw the atoning sacrifice? when you looked to Jesus and were lightened? It was the Holy Spirit who was leading you out of yourself; and God by the Holy Spirit was appearing unto you. How long is it ago? I hope I speak to some who have lately been renewed by the Holy Ghost, and to you this appearing is fresh as morning dew; but I speak to many more whose call by grace was long ago. It was "of old" that the Holy Spirit came into saving contact with your spirit, and drew you with the cords of love, and with the bands of a man. These past appearances have been eclipsed by others still more clear and full; but, at the same time, as Israel remembered the first passover as the beginning of things with the nation, so do you remember those first appearances of the Lord; for then you began to live. Some of us can remember where the Lord Jesus first met with us. Though it had been in the desert as with Moses, or by the brook as with Jacob, or by the city wall as with Joshua, or in the furnace as with Shadrach; we should for ever have reckoned the place to be holiness unto the Lord. Call it Jehovah-Shammah; for the Lord was there.

Now, dear friends, we hold this appearance *in precious memory:* "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." Many things are preserved in the treasure-house of memory; but this is the choicest of our jewels. How gracious, how glorious was the appearance of God in Christ Jesus to our soul! God full of mercy, God mighty to save, God the salvation of his people; what a sight is this! There

was nothing like it at the first; there is nothing like it now. Nothing that has ever been discovered by us since has borne comparison in preciousness to that marvellous manifestation of the ever-loving God. Time may obliterate a thousand memories, but it can never wear away the recollection of the Lord's appearances unto us.

This appearance came *in private assurance.* To me it was as personal as it was sure. I used to hear the preacher, but *then* I heard my God; I used to see the congregation, but *then* I saw him who is invisible. I used to feel the power of words, but now I have felt the immeasurable energy of their substance. God himself filled and thrilled my soul. Through and through, his almighty love pierced my heart. I know that some of you think that if God were to show himself to you, as he did to Moses or Elijah, it would be a vast blessing to you; but the Lord's present appearances are not a whit less comforting and establishing. Manifestations by his Word and Spirit are by no means second in value to those of a miraculous sort. In no case can God, who is pure spirit, be seen of the eye: he is only known by our spirit; and therefore his spiritual appearings are all we should desire. Oh, the encompassing of divine love, when it wraps us about, as a cloud enfolded the disciples upon Tabor! When the sacred hand of love grasps our very heart, we feel the heavenly grip, and every part and power of our being is moved thereby. God has an indescribable way of putting himself into communication with his people through Jesus Christ, by his Holy Spirit; and when this occurs, they say, "The Lord hath appeared *unto me.*" There is, then, no hearing and seeing for other people: "The Lord hath appeared *unto me.*" Come, my brethren, shall we go back to that time of love when first the Lord said to us, "Live"? That was a word indeed! Then every word in the Bible seemed for us: when we went up to the house of God every hymn and Scripture lesson was for us; and when we heard the sermon the Lord manifested himself in it to us. "He loved me, and gave himself for me" was our daily song; for he had personally, and of a surety, drawn nigh unto our soul, and shed abroad his love therein by the Holy Ghost.

I cannot help calling your attention to the fact, that the Lord came *in positive certainty.* The text does not say, "I hoped so," or "I thought so"; but, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying." She who spake thus saw the appearance and heard the speech. Brethren, be sure about your spiritual experience. It would be a horrible thing to leave spiritual things a matter of question, or to regard them as visionary and uncertain. To me it is bliss to say, "I know whom I have believed." My soul cannot content herself with less than certainty. I desire never to take a step upon an "if," or a "peradventure." I have often waited as to spiritual movements till I could find beneath my foot one of God's *shalls* and *wills*, upon which I could securely stand. I can never be content with the bare hope that I *may* be a child of God: I must have the Spirit bearing witness with my spirit that I am born of God. Give me infallible truth. I want facts, not fancies. O beloved, let your experience be made up of facts, and not of notions and ideas. Seek to use the plain, straightforward utterance of my text—"The Lord appeared of old

unto me, saying." If that be your case, you are happy. If it be not so, you are in an evil plight, for you are evidently without God, and therefore without hope.

II. My second head is, THE MATCHLESS DECLARATION: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." I do not want you at this moment so much to hear me and to consider my statement, as to behold the appearance of the Lord, and enjoy for yourself personally, and at once, the gracious assurance of heavenly grace.

Here is a word from God *of amazing love:* Jehovah saith, "I have loved thee." Think it over. Believe it. Stagger not at it. If the husband should say to his wife, "I have loved thee," she would believe him: it would seem only natural that he should do so. And when Jehovah says to you, a feeble woman, an unknown man, "I have loved thee," he means it. This is no fiction. God means by love what we mean by it; only his love is higher, deeper, fuller, holier than ours can ever be. Looking from his throne, the insufferable light of which your eye could not endure, Jehovah speaks in accents of fervent affection, and he says to you, "I have loved thee." Get hold of this truth that God really loves you, that you are the object of the intense delight of the Most High, and what would you have more? God's heart to you is love. Be amazed. Be enraptured with this!

Note, next, it is a declaration *of unalloyed love.* The Lord had been bruising, and wounding, and crushing his people, and yet he says, "I have loved thee." These cruel wounds were all in love. What! when he smote did he love? "Yea, I have loved thee." What! when she was past human help and foul with sin? "Yea," saith he, "I have loved thee." "But, Lord, I have never been worthy of it." "No," saith he, "but I have loved thee all the same for that." But, Lord, I have not been conscious of it. "I have loved thee all the same for that." But, Lord, I have run away from thy loving guidance. "I have loved thee all the same for that." God's heart to his people is love, love, love, love, only love. Without beginning, without end, without measure, without change is the love of Jehovah to his chosen. "I have loved thee." Oh, when I sat at home and tried to eat this roll, as the prophet did, it satiated my soul with fatness! I ardently wished that I might have voice and strength to tell out this blessed truth to you; and then I thought—Well, what matters it if I should be faint and feeble, if they will only think of the text believingly, and get it into their hearts by present enjoyment, it may even be better that the preacher should be nowhere, that the truth should be all in all. When we drink from the well we do not want the water to taste of the pitcher. If you have nothing from me I hope you will have the more from my Master. You will have no taste of me this morning, but only of this precious declaration of the Lord. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." It is love, love only, love ever, love perfect, love to the uttermost.

This statement is a declaration *of love in contrast* with certain other things. Did you notice in the fourteenth verse of the thirtieth chapter, "All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not"? Let me

sound those two notes in sharp contrast: "All thy lovers have forgotten thee"; but, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." What a difference between the false friendship of the world and sin, and the changeless love of God! You, being earth-bound in heart, have been going after your idols, and they have all deceived you. You have been trusting here and there, and your trusts have all betrayed you; but the Lord Jehovah saith, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." You have provoked him to jealousy by gods which were no gods, but he has never ceased his love. O friends, how sadly have we erred by spiritual idolatry! How often have we hewed out broken cisterns which hold no water; and yet our God loves us the same as ever! What a miracle of grace is this!

As for our love to him, how fickle! We have been hot to-day and cold to-morrow. Our love has been an April day, warm shine and cold shower; but the Lord has loved us with infinite constancy, even with an everlasting love. He has never changed. He could not love us more; he would not love us less. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." The contrast is very beautiful, if we place over against it either the world's love to us, or our own love to God. Jehovah, when he came to his people in Egypt, made himself known as "I am that I am"—the immutable God, who abides for ever the same. As such he has revealed himself to us, for he is without variableness or shadow of turning. How sweetly does immutability smile on us as we hear it say, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love"!

Thus, dear friends, our text is a word *of love in the past; "I have* loved thee." We were rebels, and he loved us. We were dead in trespasses and in sins, and he loved us. We rejected his grace, and defied his warnings, but he loved us. We came to his feet all trembling and afraid, and he loved us, and washed us, and robed us. He loved us, and therefore he saved us. Since then we have been earthly, sinful, changeful, unbelieving, proud, foolish; but he has loved us without pause. We have been ill, and racked with pain, but he has loved us. We have lost our dearest relatives by the Lord's hand, but even in this he loved us. Everything has been in a whirl round about us, but he has loved us with fixed affection. Our life has been a strange labyrinth, but he has loved us, and that love has been the clue of the maze. How sweet it is, beloved, to roll up the years gone by, and put them away with this label: "Days of the loving-kindness of the Lord!"

The matchless declaration of the text is a voice *of love in the present.* The Lord loves the believer now. Whatever discomfort you are in, the Lord loves you. In this house, perhaps, your heart is failing you with fear; but the Lord still says to you, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." "Everlasting" includes to-day. Things present are provided for as well as things to come. External circumstances do not change the love of God, nor will your internal condition do so. Has he not said, "I am God, I change not"? Everlasting love makes no leaps and jumps so as to leave out this day of trouble, and that hour of temptation. Even at this dark hour thy name is on the heart of thy God.

The text is a voice *of love in the future.* It means, "I will love thee

for ever." God has not loved us with a love which will die out after a certain length of time: his love is like himself, "from everlasting to everlasting." If you will read the chapter through to the end, you will see how God was about to deal with his chosen; he says, "I will build thee, and thou shalt be built"; "He that scattered Israel will gather him"; "I will turn their mourning into joy"; "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." These are outflowings of a love which goes on for ever.

"Father, 'twas thy love that knew us
Earth's foundations long before:
That same love to Jesus drew us
By its sweet constraining power,
And will keep us
Safely now, and evermore."

It is a joy worth ten thousand worlds to have this assurance sealed in the heart by the Holy Spirit; "I have loved thee with an everlasting love."

This is a declaration *of love secured to us*—secured in many ways. Did you observe in this chapter how the Lord secures his love to his people, first, by a covenant? Read the first verse: "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people." See further on from verse thirty-one to thirty-four. The covenant is summed up in these words, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people": and if it be so, the Lord's love must indeed be everlasting. God has pledged himself to his saints by a covenant of salt, "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." The tenor of the covenant is, "I will, and they shall." How my heart delights in this! God loves me with an everlasting love, and he embodies that love in an everlasting covenant.

Further, this love is secured by relationship. Will you dart your eye on to the ninth verse, and read the last part of it? "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." A man cannot get rid of fatherhood by any possible means. Ay, though my boy should transgress and dishonour his father's name, yet I am still his father. There is no getting out of this relationship by any conceivable method; and so, if, indeed, the Lord be unto thee a Father, he will ever give thee a father's love. In thine adoption and regeneration the Lord has avowed himself to be thy Father, and has virtually said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." "The son abideth ever." "If children, then heirs."

His love is pledged again by redemption. Read the eleventh verse: "For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he." Would you see the indenture of God's covenant love? Behold it in the indented hands and feet of the Crucified Redeemer. How shall Christ leave off loving his people when he has their names graven on the palms of his hands? Redemption has sealed everlasting love. That spear which found out his heart and set flowing its blood and its water, has killed all doubts as to the eternal endurance of our Lord's love. From henceforth let no man question our Well-beloved; for he bears in his body the

marks of his everlasting love. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and his love to his chosen is at this time what it was before time began.

Once more, in this passage of the book of the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord certifies his love to his people in a very solemn way, by calling heaven and earth to witness to it. Let me read from the thirty-fifth verse. "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name: if those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the Lord; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord." Thus are the laws of nature made to seal the law of love. God that cannot lie thus makes the whole creation to be a guarantee of his abiding love to his own. I pray you, believe him, and be joyful in his house of prayer.

This is a declaration *of love divinely confessed.* The Lord has not sent this assurance to us by a prophet, but he has made it himself—"*The Lord* hath appeared." This declaration does not come through another tongue or lip; but the divine Lover himself breathes his own love-word to his chosen: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love."

Notice, that it is *love sealed with a "yea."* God would have us go no further in our ordinary speech than to say "yea, yea"; and surely we may be content with so much from himself. His "yea" amounts to a sacred asseveration: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." He lifts his hand to heaven, and he swears—swears by himself, because he can swear by no greater, "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Beloved, do feast upon this! I am very conscious of the feebleness of my exposition; but I am equally conscious of the great strength of the precious doctrines which I have set before you.

III. We finish, thirdly, with THE MANIFEST EVIDENCE. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Here are *drawings mentioned.* Have you not felt them? We have not seen God, beloved, but we have felt him drawing us. Oh, what tugs he gave to some of us when we were children! Do you remember, when you were boys and girls, when you could not sleep at nights for heavenly drawings towards divine things? Do you recollect, when you were in the country alone, how you would sit down under a hedge and cry, you scarce knew why, longing for something better than you had as yet reached? Do you remember when the Lord Jesus drew you out of the horrible pit? out of the midnight of despair? Do you remember how he drew you till he set your feet upon a rock? He drew you from spiritual death, from the corruption of sin, from the dominion of the devil. He drew you into life, love, and liberty. He drew you to the foot of the cross, to the throne of grace, to the church of Christ. How well do I recall the

hour when I was drawn to the place where I saw one hanging on a tree in agonies and blood, and there and then I looked, and as I looked I lived. Since then the Lord has drawn me along the paths of duty and delight, of faith and peace, of love and joy, of hope and rapture.

These were *drawings resulting from love.* He drew us because he loved us with an everlasting love. Other drawings of divine goodness are resisted, resisted in some cases to the bitter end, and men justly perish; but the drawings of everlasting love effect their purpose. If you have been drawn to Christ, it is because God loved you before the world began. Do not think the Lord began to love you when you began to love him. Oh, no! If God loves thee now, he did love thee or ever the earth was. If this day he loves thee, he loved thee when there were no days, but the Ancient of days. He saw thee through the glass of his prescience, and he loved thee and predestinated thee to be conformed unto the image of his Son; and from this purpose of love he will never turn aside. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." He will not alter the thing which has gone out of his lips.

Here are drawings mentioned: these were *drawings from God.* How sweetly, how omnipotently, God can draw! When he begins to draw a man, that person may pull back, and perhaps even for years may stand out against divine grace; but when the Lord puts forth his omnipotence the man is bound to yield. Without violating the will of man or making him less a free agent than he used to be, the lovingkindness of the Lord can act as a charm upon him and win him completely with his full consent. "Draw me; we will run after thee." He draws, and we run. When Jehovah would have Israel come to Zion, it soon comes to pass that Israel longs to go thither. See in the sixth verse: "For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God." We yield to the drawings because they come from the Lord's own hand, and their power lies in his love.

As the drawings come from God, so are they *drawings to God.* Blessed is he whose heart is being drawn nearer and nearer to the Most High. Naturally, we struggle back to carnal things: we get taken up with business, with the family, and with a thousand grovelling cares; but when the Holy Spirit draws, it is upward and heavenward. He draws us to repentance, to faith, to love, to holiness, and to continuance in well-doing. Oh, that we may now feel divine drawings towards him who is our all in all!

The Lord assures us that these are *drawings of his lovingkindness.* However he draws, it is in love; and whenever he draws, it is in love. Observe that the church does not here say, "The Lord drew me"; but the Lord himself says, "With lovingkindness have I drawn thee." God knows better about his drawings than we do. We think that he pulls and snatches in anger, but he knows that he has always drawn in lovingkindness. Because the horse is wilful, it thinks the driver stern: our waywardness makes us think our Lord austere. The forces which he puts forth to work upon us are tender, gentle, kind, and loving. He has drawn you and me "with lovingkindness."

I am sure he has thus dealt with me. Will you think of your own case, and bless his name? Lord, thou hast drawn me when I did not know it; thou hast drawn me when I thought I was willingly moving of my own accord. I see it now, and I bless thy name for it. Draw me still, that I may still say, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." What a wonderful word is that—"lovingkindness"—"loving," "kindness"; two of the choicest koh-i-noors set side by side! Kindness is kinnedness, and the Lord Jesus treats us as his kith and kin; and he does this in the most loving manner. "With lovingkindness have I drawn thee." He might have whipped me to himself; he might have dragged me to the city of refuge; he might have threatened me into repentance; he might have thundered me into submission; but no, "with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." I spoke to a brother in Christ yesterday who called himself—and I think he spoke the truth—"a specially favoured one." I take that title also. Take it, my sister! Take it, my brother! Does it not fit you well? Has not the Lord been specially good to you? "With lovingkindness have I drawn thee." "Alas!" cries one, "but I have been whipped. 'Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised.'" Very true; but how few have been the strokes, compared with what you deserved! "Oh, but God has rebuked me sharply," says another. I answer again, how few have been his chidings compared with what we might have expected considering our evil ways! Prevailingly his cords have been cords of love, and his bands have been the bands of a man. Bless the Lord, O my soul! He leadeth me beside the still waters.

Only one thing more. *These drawings are to be continuous.* "With lovingkindness have I drawn thee"; and he means to do the same evermore. If you will look the chapter through, you will see that God promises to keep on drawing.

See verse 8: "Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth." Verse 9: "They shall come. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way." Read verse 10: "He that scattered Israel will gather him." See verse 12: "Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord." He that has begun to draw will go on drawing us, till he has safely landed us where his everlasting love shall be our endless theme of song, even in heaven, where we shall dwell in eternal fellowship with the Eternal God. The everlastingness of divine love is the crown of it all.

I would not care to preach to you a gospel which has no final perseverance in it. Spiritual life which can die, is not the eternal life promised in the gospel; and heavenly love which can fail is not the everlasting love of our text. Whenever I find that doctrine left out, I feel as if they had taken away the wheat from the barn, and the grapes from the wine-press. If the salvation which you set forth to be that of Christ be a temporary one, you may have it that like it; I will have none of it. I believe in everlasting love, and I can do with nothing less. My hope to get to heaven lies in this: as far as I have come on the road, the Lord has drawn me, and he will draw me the rest of the way. I have had no strength of my own until now; I

have had no might but what he has afforded me; and I look to the Lord still for all the grace I shall need between this spot and the gate of pearl.

Such a magnificent text as ours ought to make us consider two things. The first is, Is it so? *Am I drawn?* If God loves you with an everlasting love, he has drawn you by his lovingkindness: is it so or not? Has he drawn you by his Holy Spirit, so that you have followed on? Are you a believer? Do you carry Christ's cross? You have been drawn to this. Then take home these gracious words: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." If you have not been so drawn, do you not wish you were? Oh, it were worth dying a thousand deaths to be a Christian after that fashion of Christianity which is based on everlasting love! Here is a glorious foundation: love without beginning, love without end; free, sovereign, unchangeable love; not bought by merit in us, nor produced by our efforts or entreaties: love which comes to us because God will love, and has chosen in his divine sovereignty to love *us*. "Everlasting love!" Why, the syllables are music. If you can climb that height, you have climbed where it is worth while to abide for ever. O man, if you cannot claim this, at any rate desire it, and go humbly on your knees to Christ Jesus, and look to him, and live!

But, child of God, if you know these drawings, and if it be true that God loves you with an everlasting love, then *are you resting?* "I have a feeble hope," says one. What? How can you talk so? He who is loved with an everlasting love, and knows it, should swim in an ocean of joy. Not a wave of trouble should disturb the glassy sea of his delight. What is to make a man happy if this will not? Come, come; we must have no more hanging heads. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! If the Lord has loved me with an everlasting love, I will not be cast down, though the earth be removed. His love is better than wealth, better than health (great blessing as that is), better than honour, better than usefulness. Everlasting love, and thou hast it! Man alive, wipe the tears out of thine eyes, and lift up thine head! "Oh, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him"; for if he hath loved thee so, what hast thou to fear? What is to be done but to love him in return who has loved us so much? One thing I know—

> "All that remains for me
> Is but to love and sing,
> And wait until the angels come
> To bear me to my King."

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jeremiah xxx. 12—17; xxxi. 1—14.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—220, 229, 748.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"ALL THE DAY LONG."

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 22ND, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off."—Proverbs xxiii. 17, 18.

LAST Lord's-day we had for our texts two promises. I trust they were full of comfort to the tried people of God, and to souls in the anguish of conviction. To-day we will consider two precepts, that we may not seem to neglect any part of the Word of God; for the precept is as divine as the promise. Here we have a command given of the Holy Spirit through the wisest of men; and therefore both on the divine and on the human side it is most weighty. I said that Solomon was the wisest of men, and yet he became, in practice, the most foolish. By his folly, he gained a fresh store of experience of the saddest sort, and we trust that he turned to God with a penitent heart, and so became wiser than ever—wiser with a second wisdom which the grace of God had given him, to consecrate his earthly wisdom. He who had been a voluptuous prince became the wise preacher in Israel: let us give our hearts to know the wisdom which he taught.

The words of Solomon to his own son are not only wise, but full of tender anxiety; worthy, therefore, to be set in the highest degree as to value, and to be received with heartiness as the language of fatherly affection.

These verses are found in the Book of Proverbs: let them pass current as proverbs in the church of God, as they did in Israel of old. Let them be "familiar in our mouths as household words." Let them be often quoted, frequently weighed, and then carried into daily practice. God grant that this particular text may become proverbial in this church from this day forward. May the Holy Ghost impress it on every memory and heart! May it be embodied in all our lives!

If you will look steadily at the text you will see, first, *the prescribed course of the godly man:* "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Secondly, you will note *the probable interruption* of that course. It occurred in those past ages, and it occurs still: "Let not thine heart envy sinners." We are often tempted to repine because the wicked

prosper: the fear of the Lord within us is disturbed and injured by envious thoughts, which will lead on to murmuring and to distrust of our heavenly Father, unless they be speedily checked. So foolish and ignorant are we, that we lose our walk with God by fretting because of evil-doers. Thirdly, we shall notice, before we close, *the helpful consideration*, which may enable us to hold on our way, and to cease from fretting about the proud prosperity of the ungodly: "For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off."

I. Oh, for grace to practise what the Spirit of God says with regard to our first point, THE PRESCRIBED COURSE OF THE BELIEVER—"Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long!" The fear of the Lord is a brief description for true religion. It is an inward condition, betokening hearty submission to our heavenly Father. It consists very much in a holy reverence of God, and a sacred awe of him. This is accompanied by a child-like trust in him, which leads to loving obedience, tender submission, and lowly adoration. It is a filial fear. Not the fear which hath torment; but that which goes with joy, when we "rejoice with trembling."

We must, first of all, *be* in the fear of God, before we can remain in it "all the day long." This can never be our condition, except as the fruit of the new birth. To be in the fear of the Lord, "ye must be born again." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and we are taught therein by the Holy Spirit, who is the sole author of all our grace. Where this fear exists, it is the token of eternal life, and it proves the abiding indwelling of the Holy Ghost. "Happy is the man that feareth alway." "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him." This holy fear of the living God is the life of God showing itself in the quickened ones.

This fear, according to the text, is for all the day, and for every day: the longest day is not to be too long for our reverence, nor for our obedience. If our days are lengthened until the day of life declines into the evening of old age, still are we to be in the fear of God; yea, as the day grows longer, our holy fear must be deeper.

This is contrary to the habit of those persons who have *a religion of show;* they are very fine, very holy, very devout, when anybody looks at them; this is rather the love of human approbation than the fear of the Lord. The Pharisee, with a halfpenny in one hand and a trumpet in the other, is a picture of the man who gives an alms only that his praises may be sounded forth. The Pharisee, standing at the corner of the street, saying his prayers, is a picture of the man who never prays in secret, but is very glib in pious assemblies. "Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward." Show religion is a vain show. Do nothing to be seen of men, or you will ripen into a mere hypocrite.

Neither may we regard godliness as something off the common —an extraordinary thing. Have not *a religion of spasms.* We have heard of men and women who have been singularly excellent on one occasion, but never again: they blazed out like comets, the wonders of a season, and they disappeared like comets, never to be seen again. Religion produced at high pressure for a supreme occasion is not a healthy growth. We need an ordinary, common-place, every-day

godliness, which may be compared to the light of the fixed stars which shineth evermore. Religion must not be thought of as something apart from daily life; it should be the most vital part of our existence. Our praying should be like our breathing, natural and constant; our communion with God should be like our taking of food, a happy and natural privilege. Brethren, it is a great pity when people draw a hard and fast line across their life, dividing it into the sacred and the secular. Say not, "This is religion, and the other is business," but sanctify all things. Our commonest acts should be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, and thus made into sacred deeds. The best of men have the least of jar or change of tone in their lives. When the great Elijah knew that he was to be taken up, what did he do? If you knew that to-night you would be carried away to heaven, you would think of something special with which to quit this earthly scene; and yet the most fitting thing to do would be to continue in your duty, as you would have done if nothing had been revealed to you. It was Elijah's business to go to the schools of the prophets and instruct the young students; and he went about that business until he took his seat in the chariot of fire. He said to Elisha, "The Lord hath sent me to Bethel." When he had exhorted the Bethel students he thought of the other college, and said to his attendant, "The Lord hath sent me to Jericho." He took his journey with as much composure as if he had a lifetime before him, and thus fulfilled his tutorship till the Lord sent him to Jordan, whence he went up by a whirlwind into heaven. What is there better for a man of God than to abide in his calling wherein he glorifies God? That which God has given you to do you should do. That, and nothing else, come what may. If any of you should to-morrow have a revelation that you must die, it would not be wise to go upstairs and sit down, and read, or pray, until the usual day's work was finished. Go on, good woman, and send the children to school, and cook the dinner, and go about the proper business of the day, and then if you are to die you will have left no ends of life's web to ravel out. So live that your death shall not be a piece of strange metal soldered on to your life, but part and parcel of all that has gone before. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Living or dying we are the Lord's, and let us live as such.

Ours must never be *a religion that is periodic in its flow*, like certain intermittent springs, which flow and ebb, and flow only to ebb again. Beware of the spirit which is in a rapture one hour, and in a rage the next. Beware of serving Christ on Sunday, and Mammon on Monday. Beware of the godliness which varies with the calendar. Every Sunday morning some folks take out their godliness and touch it up, while they are turning the brush round their best hat. Many women, after a fashion, put on the fear of God with their new bonnet. When the Sunday is over, and their best things are put away, they have also put away their best thoughts and their best behaviour. We must have a seven-days' religion, or else we have none at all. Periodical godliness is perpetual hypocrisy. He that towards Jesus can be enemy and friend by turns is in truth always an enemy. We need a religion which, like the poor, we have always with us; which, like our heart,

is always throbbing, and, like our breath, is always moving. Some people have strange notions on this point: they are holy only on holy days, and in holy places. There was a man who was always pious on Good Friday. He showed no token of religion on any other Friday, or indeed on any other day; but on Good Friday nothing would stop him from going to church in the morning, after he had eaten a hot-cross bun for breakfast. That day he took the Sacrament, and felt much better: surely he might well enough do so, since on his theory he had taken in grace enough to last him for another year. You and I believe such ideas to be ignorant and superstitious; but we must take heed that we do not err after a similar manner. Every Friday must be a Good Friday to us. May we become so truly gracious that to us every day becomes a holy day; our garments, vestments; our meals, sacraments; our houses, temples; our families, churches; our lives, sacrifices; ourselves kings and priests unto God! May the bells upon our horses be "holiness unto the Lord"! God send us religion of this kind, for this will involve our being "in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

Let us practically note the details which are comprised in the exhortation, "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." The sun is up, and we awake. May we each one feel, "When I awake I am still with thee." It is wise to rise in proper time; for drowsiness may waste an hour, and cause us to be behindhand all the day, so that we cannot get into order, and act as those who quietly walk with God. If I am bound to be in the fear of God all the day long, I am bound to begin well, with earnest prayer, and sweet communion with God. On rising, it is as essential to prepare the heart as to wash the face; as necessary to put on Christ as to put on one's garments. Our first word should be with our heavenly Father. It is good for the soul's health to begin the day by taking a satisfying draught from the river of the water of life. Very much more depends upon beginnings than some men think. How you go to bed to-night may be determined by your getting up this morning. If you get out of bed on the wrong side, you may keep on the wrong side all the day. If your heart be right in the waking, it will be a help towards its being right till sleeping. Go not forth into a dry world till the morning dew lies on thy branch. Baptize thy heart in devotion ere thou wade into the stream of daily care. See not the face of man until thou hast first seen the face of God. Let thy first thoughts fly heavenward, and let thy first breathings be prayer.

And now we are downstairs, and are off to business, or to labour. As you hurry along the street, think of these words, "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Leave not thy God at home: thou needest him most abroad. In mingling with thy fellow-men, be *with* them, but be not *of* them, if that would involve thy forgetting thy Lord. That early interview which thou hast had with thy Beloved should perfume thy conversation all the day. A smile from Jesus in the morning will be sunshine all the day. Endeavour, when thou art plying the trowel, or driving the plane, or guiding the plough, or using the needle or the pen, to keep up constant communication with thy Father and thy Lord. Let the telephone between thee and the

Eternal never cease from its use: do thou put thine ear to it, and hear what the Lord shall speak to thee; and do thou put thy mouth to it, and ask counsel from the oracle above. Whether you work long hours or short hours, "Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

But it is time for meals. Be thou in the fear of the Lord at thy table. The soul may be poisoned while the body is being nourished, if we turn the hour of refreshment into an hour of indulgence. Some have been gluttonous, more have been drunken. Do not think of thy table as though it were a hog's trough, where the animal might gorge to the full; but watch thine appetite, and by holy thanksgiving make thy table to be the Lord's table. So eat the bread of earth as to eat bread at last in the kingdom of God. So drink that thy head and heart may be in the best condition to serve God. When God feeds thee do not profane the occasion by excess, or defile it by loose conversation.

During the day our business calls us into company. Our associations in labour may not be so choice as we could wish; but he that earns his bread is often thrown where his own will would not lead him. If we were never to deal with ungodly men, it would be necessary for us to go out of the world. He that is in the fear of God all the day long, will watch his own spirit, and language, and actions, that these may be such as becometh the gospel of Christ in whatever society his lot may be cast. Seek not to be a hermit or a monk; but be a man of God among men. When making a bargain, or selling thy goods to customers, be thou in the fear of God. It may be needful to go into the market, or on the exchange; but be in the fear of the Lord amid the throng. It may be, thou wilt seldom be able to speak of that which is most dear to thee, lest thou cast pearls before swine; but thou must abide always under holy and heavenly influence, so as to be always ready to give a reason for the hope which is in thee with meekness and fear. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long," though thine ears may be vexed and thy heart grieved with the evil around thee. He that cannot be in the fear of God in London cannot in the country.

The company have now gone, and you are alone; maintain the fear of the Lord in thy solitude. Beware of falling into solitary sin. Certain young men and women, when alone, pull out a wicked novel which they would not like to be seen reading; and others will have their sly nips though they would be reputed very temperate. If a man be right with God he is in his best company when alone; and he seeks therein to honour his God, and not to grieve him. Surely, when I am alone with God, I am bound to use my best manners. Do nothing which you would be afraid to have known. Be in the fear of the Lord when you are so much alone that you have no fear of men.

The evening draws in, the shop is closed, and you have a little time to yourself. Our young people in shops need a rest and a walk. Is this your case? "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." In the evening, as well as in the morning, be true to your Lord. Beware of ill company in the evening! Take care that you never say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me." "Be thou in the fear of the

Lord" when sinners entice thee, and at once refuse any offer which is not pleasing to God.

"Recreation," says one. Yes, recreation. There are many helpful and healthy recreations which can in moderation be used to advantage; but engage in no pastime which would hinder your continuing in the fear of the Lord. In your recreation forget not your higher *re-creation* wherein you were created anew in Christ Jesus. Our chief rest lies in a change of service for our Lord; our fullest pleasure in followship with Jesus.

Night has fallen around us, and we are home with our families: let us not forget to close the day with family prayer and private prayer, as we opened it. Our chamber must see nothing which angels might blush to look upon. Those holy beings come and go where holy ones repose. Angels have a special liking for sleeping saints. Did they not put a ladder from heaven down to the place where Jacob lay? Though he had only a stone for his pillow, the earth for his bed, the hedges for his curtains, and the skies for his canopy, yet God was there, and angels flocked about him. Between God's throne and the beds of holy men there has long been a much frequented road. Sleep in Jesus every night, so that you may sleep in Jesus at the last. From dawn to midnight "be thou in the fear of the Lord."

Let us now remember special occasions. All days are not quite the same. Exceptional events will happen, and these are all included in the day. You sustain, perhaps, one day, a great loss, and unexpectedly find yourself far poorer than when you left your bed. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord" when under losses and adversities. When the great waterfloods prevail, and storms of trials sweep over thee, remain in the ark of the fear of the Lord, and thou shalt be as safe as Noah was.

Possibly you may have a wonderful day of success; but be not always gaping for it. Yet your ship may come home; your windfall may drop at your feet. Beyond anything you have expected, a surprising gain may fall into your lap: be not unduly excited, but remain in the fear of the Lord. Take heed that thou be not lifted up with pride, so as to dote upon thy wealth; for then thy God may find it needful to afflict thee out of love to thy soul.

It may happen, during the day, that you are assailed by an unusual temptation. Christian men are well armed against common temptations, but sudden assaults may injure them; therefore, "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long," and then surprises will not overthrow you. You shall not be afraid of evil tidings, neither shall you be betrayed by evil suggestions, if you are rooted and grounded in the constant fear of the Lord.

During the day, perhaps, you are maliciously provoked. An evil person assails you with envenomed speech; and if you a little lose your temper your adversary takes advantage of your weakness, and becomes more bitter and slanderous. He hurls at you things which ought not to be thought of, much less to be said. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long"; "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath"; "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The adversary knows your tender place, and therefore he says the most atrocious

things against God and holy things. Heed him not; but in patience possess your soul, and in the fear of the Lord you will find an armour which his poisoned arrows cannot pierce. "May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

It may be, that during the day you will have to act in a very difficult business. Common transactions between man and man are easy enough to honest minds; but every now and then a nice point is raised, a point of conscience, a matter not to be decided off-hand: "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Spread the hard case before the Lord. Judge a matter as it will be judged before his bar; and if this be too much for thy judgment, then wait upon God for further light. No man goes astray even in a difficult case, if he is accustomed to cry, like David, "Bring hither the ephod." This holy Book and the divine Spirit will guide us aright when our best judgment wavers. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

But, alas! you are feeling very unwell; this day will differ from those of activity. You cannot go to business; you have to keep to your bed. Fret not, but "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." If the day has to last through the night because sleep forsakes you, be still with your thoughts soaring toward heaven, your desires quiet in your Father's bosom, and your mind happy in the sympathy of Christ. To have our whole being bathed and baptized in the Holy Ghost is to find health in sickness, and joy in pain.

It may be, also, that you suffer from a mental sickness in the form of depression of spirit. Things look very dark, and your heart is very heavy. Mourner, "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." When life is like a foggy day—when providence is cloudy and stormy, and you are caught in a hurricane—still "be in the fear of the Lord." When your soul is exceeding sorrowful, and you are bruised as a cluster trodden in the wine-press, yet cling close to God, and never let go your reverent fear of him. However exceptional and unusual may be your trial, yet vow within your soul, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

I have sketched the matter roughly. *Let me now suggest to you excellent reasons* for being always in the fear of the Lord. Ought we not to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long, since he sees us all the day long? Does the Lord ever take his eye from off us? Doth the keeper of Israel ever slumber? If God were not our God, but only our lawful master, I should say, "Let us not be eye-servants"; but since we cannot escape his all-seeing eye, let us be the more careful how we behave ourselves. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long"; for Jehovah, whom thou fearest, sees thee without ceasing.

Remember, also, that sin is equally evil all the day long. Is there an hour when it would be right to disobey God? Is there some interval in which the law of holiness has no force? I trow not. Therefore, never consent to sin. To fear God is always right: to put away the fear of God from before our eyes would be always criminal; therefore, be ever in the fear of God. Remember the strictness of Nehemiah's

integrity, and how he said, "So did not I because of the fear of the Lord."

Walk in the fear of the Lord at all times, because you always belong to Christ. The blood-mark is always upon you; will you ever belie it? You have been chosen, and you are always chosen; you have been bought with a price, and you are always your Lord's; you have been called out from the world by the Holy Spirit, and he is always calling you; you have been preserved by sovereign grace, and you are always so preserved: therefore, by the privileges you enjoy, you are bound to abide in the fear of the Lord. How could you lay down your God-given and heaven-honoured character of a child of God? Nay, rather cling for ever to your adoption, and the heritage it secures you.

You can never tell when Satan will attack you, therefore be always in the fear of the Lord. You are in an enemy's country. Soldiers, be always on the watch! Soldiers, keep in order of fight! You might straggle from the ranks, and begin to lie about in the hedges, and sleep without sentries if you were in your own country; but you are marching through the foeman's land, where an enemy lurks behind every bush. The fear of the Lord is your sword and shield; never lay it down.

Furthermore, remember that your Lord may come at any hour. Before the word can travel from my lip to your ear Jesus may be here. While you are in business, or on your bed, or in the field, the flaming heavens may proclaim his advent. Stand, therefore, with your loins girt and your lamps trimmed, ready to go in to the supper whenever the Bridegroom comes. Or you may die. As a church we have had a double warning, during the last few days, in the departure of our two beloved elders, Messrs. Hellier and Croker. They have been carried home like shocks of corn, fully ripe. They have departed in peace, and have joyfully entered into rest. We also are on the margin of the dividing stream: our feet are dipped in the waters which wash the river's brim. We, too, shall soon ford the black torrent. In a moment, suddenly, we may be called away: let every action be such that we would not object to have it quoted as our last action. Let every day be so spent that it might fitly be the close of life on earth. Let our near and approaching end help to keep us "in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

If we keep in that state, *observe the admirable results!* To abide in the fear of the Lord is to dwell safely. To forsake the Lord would be to court danger. In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, but apart from it there is no security. How honourable is such a state! Men ridicule the religion which is not uniform. I heard of a brother who claimed to have long been a teetotaler; but some doubted. When he was asked how long he had been an abstainer, he replied, "Off and on, for twenty years." You should have seen the significant smile upon all faces. An abstainer off and on! His example did not stand for much. Certain professors are Christians "off and on"; and nobody respects them. Such seed as this will not grow: there is no vitality in it. Constancy is the proof of sincerity. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long": this is to be happy. God has

spoiled the believer for being easy in sin. If you are a Christian you will never find happiness in departing from God. I say again, God has spoiled you for such pleasure. Your joy lies in a closer walk with God: your heaven on earth is in communion with the Lord.

If you abide in the fear of the Lord, how useful you will be! Your "off and on" people are worth nothing: nobody is influenced by them. What little good they do, they undo. The abiding man is also the growing man. He that is "in the fear of the Lord all the day long" gets to have more of that fear; and it has more practical power over his life and heart. What a poor life they lead who are alternately zealous and lukewarm! Like Penelope, they weave by day, but unravel by night. They blow hot and cold, and so melt and freeze by turns. They build and then break down, and so are never at rest. Children of God, let your conduct be consistent. Let not your lives be like a draught-board, with as many blacks as whites. Do not be speckled birds; like magpies, more famed for chatter than anything else. Oh, that God would make us white doves! I pray you be not bold one day and cowardly another; be not one day sound in the faith, and the next day on the down-grade. Be not under excitement generous, and in cool blood mean as a miser. Oh, that we might become like our Father in heaven in holiness, and then become like him in immutability, so as to be for ever holy!

From all this *let us infer our great need.* I think I hear somebody say, "You are cutting out a nice bit of work for us." Am I? Believe me, I am looking to a stronger hand than yours. To be in the fear of the Lord for a single day is not to be accomplished by unrenewed nature; it is a work of grace. See, then, what great grace you will need for all the days of your life. Go for it, and get it. See how little you can do without the Spirit of God: without his indwelling you will soon cast off all fear of the Lord. Plead the covenant promise, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Depend upon God for everything; and as you know that salvation is of faith that it might be by grace, exercise much faith towards God. Believe that he can make you to be in his fear all the day long. "According to your faith, be it unto you." Believe holiness to be possible; seek after it, and possess it. Faith, as it is the channel of grace, must always be associated with truth. True faith lives on truth. If you give up the doctrines of the gospel, you will not be in the fear of God at all; and if you begin to doubt them, you will not be "in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Get solid truth for the foundation of your faith, and let your firm faith bring you daily grace, that you may manifestly be always in the fear of the Lord.

II. Now I have rightly taken up the most of my time with the principal topic, and we will only have a word or two upon the next theme. Let us consider THE PROBABLE INTERRUPTION. It has happened to godly men in all ages to see *the wicked prosper;* and they have been staggered by the sight. You see a man who has no conscience, making money in your trade, while you make none. Sometimes you think that your conscientiousness hinders you; and I hope it is nothing else. You see another person scheming and cheating: to him honesty is mere policy, and Sabbath-labour is no difficulty; for the

Word of God is nothing to him. You cannot do as he does, and therefore you do not seem to get on as he does. Be it so: but let not his prosperity grieve you. There is something better to live for than mere money-making. If your life pleases God, let it please *you*. Never envy the ungodly. Suppose God allows them to succeed—what then? You should no more envy them than you envy fat bullocks the ribbons which adorn them at the show. They are ready for the slaughter. Do you wish yourself in their place? The fate of the prosperous sinner is one to be dreaded: he is set on high to be cast down.

Do not even in your wish deprive the ungodly of their transient happiness. Their present prosperity is the only heaven they will ever know. Let them have as much of it as they can. I have heard of a wife who treated her unkind and ungodly husband with great gentleness for this very reason. She said, "I have prayed for him, and entreated him to think about his soul; but at last I have come to fear that he will die in his sins, and therefore I have made up my mind that I will make him as happy as I can in this life. I tremble to think of what his misery must be in the world to come, and therefore I will make him happy *now*." O men in your senses, surely you will not grudge poor swine their husks and swill! Nay, fill the trough, and let the creature feed; for it has neither part nor lot in a higher life. Believer, take thou thy bitter cup and drink it without complaining; for an hour with thy God will be a hundredfold recompense for a life of trial.

One is the more tried because *these men are very apt to boast*. They crow over the suffering believer, saying, "What comes of your religion? You are worse off than I am. See how splendidly I get on without God!" Care nothing for their boasting; it will end so soon. Their tongue walketh through the earth, but it only utters vanity.

It is galling to see *the enemies of God triumphant*. Their policy for a time beats the plain protest of the lover of truth. Their deceit baffles the plain man. The lovers of error outnumber the men of God. Such men tread on creeds and trust-deeds and every other legal protection of honest people. What care they? They despise the old-fashioned folk whom they oppress. Remember Haman, in the Book of Esther, and note how glorious he was till he was hung up on the gallows.

There is no real cause for envying the wicked; for their present is danger, their future is doom. I see them now on yonder island, sporting, dancing, feasting merrily. I am standing as on a bare rock, and I might well envy them their island of roses and lilies; but as I watch I see that their fairy island is gradually sinking to destruction. The ocean is rising all around; the waves are carrying away the shores: even while they dance the floods advance. Lo, yonder is one infatuated wretch sinking amidst the devouring flood. The rest continue at their play; but it cannot last much longer. They will soon be gone. Let me stand on my lone rock, rather than sink amid their fleeting luxury. Let me abide in safety rather than dance where danger is all around.

Ay, dear friends, if you envy the wicked *it will do you serious harm.*

Envy helps in no way, but it hinders in many ways. If you envy the wicked you may soon wish to be like them. If you do so wish, you are like them now! He that would be willing to be wicked in order to prosper, is wicked already. He who says, "I should like to do as they do, that I might grow rich as they do"; why, he is a man that has his price, and would sell his soul if he could meet a purchaser. No, not for all the world would we share the lot of unbelievers. We would sit in the gate with Mordecai sooner than feast with the king with Haman. God help us, dear friends, that we may not be disturbed by seeing the prosperity of the wicked.

III. We close with THE HELPFUL CONSIDERATION. The text says, "For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off."

First, then, *there is an end of this life.* These things are not for ever: on the contrary, all that we see is a dissolving view. Surely, every man walketh in a vain show: even as a show it is vain. You talk of spiritual things as though they were shadows; but in very truth these are the only substance. Temporal things are as the mirage of the desert. The things about us are such stuff as dreams are made of; and when we truly awake we shall despise their image. In all wealth and honour there are a worm and a moth. Think of the sinner's end, and you will no longer be troubled when he spreads himself like a green bay tree.

Next, *there is an end of the worldling's prosperity.* He makes his money. What then? He makes more. What then? He makes more. What then? He dies; and there is a little notice in the newspaper which says that he died worth so much; which, being interpreted, means that he was taken away from so much which he never possessed, but guarded for his heir. There is an end in death, and after death the judgment; "for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing." What an end will that be! The sinner may live as carelessly as he pleases, but he must answer for it at the judgment-seat of Christ. Loud may be his laughter, sarcastic and bitter may be his criticisms upon religion; but there is an end; and when the death-sweat beads his brow, he will lower his key, and need help from that very gospel which he criticized. "There is an end." Let us not spend our lives for that which hath an end: an immortal soul should seek immortal joys.

Dear friends, to you there is an end in quite another sense. *God has an end in your present trouble and exercise.* Your difficulties and trials are sent as messengers from God with gracious design. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long"; for every part of the day hath its tendency to work out your spiritual education, your preparation for the heaven to come. In everything that happens to you your heavenly Father has an end. The arrows of calamity are aimed at your sins. Your bitter cups are meant to purify the inward parts of the soul. Fret not, but trust. There is an old proverb, that you should never let children and fools see half-finished works: even so, the work of God in providence cannot be judged of by such poor children as we are; for we cannot see to the end of the Lord's design. My brethren, when we see the end from the beginning, and behold

God's work complete, we shall have a very different view of things from what we have now, while the work is still proceeding.

Lastly, whilst there is an end to the wicked, *there will be no failure to your expectation.* What are you expecting? That God will keep his promise? And so he will. That God will give you peace in the end? And so he will. That he will raise you from the dead, and set you in heavenly places with Christ? And so he will. And that you shall be for ever with the Lord, and he will grant you glory and bliss? And so he will. "Your expectation shall not be cut off." Every Christian is a man of great expectations, and none of them will fail. Let him cultivate his hope, and enlarge its scope; for the hopes which are built on Jesus and his grace will never disappoint us. In our case the birds in the bush are better birds than those in the hand; and they are quite as sure. The promise of God is in itself a possession, and our expectation of it is in itself an enjoyment.

I have done, dear friends. May the Holy Spirit speak these things home to your hearts! Christian people ought to be exceedingly glad; for if they have but a small estate, they have it on an endless tenure. The worldling may have a large house, but he has it only upon a short lease: he will have nothing soon. Just now there is a great noise made about leaseholds falling in. Every ungodly man may have his life-lease run out to-morrow! But the believer has a freehold. What he has is his without reserve. "Their inheritance shall be for ever." By faith grasp the eternal. Treasure the spiritual. Rejoice in God, and "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." God grant you this in his great grace, for Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxxvii.

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HOLY LONGINGS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 29TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments. Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."—Psalm cxix. 131, 132, 133.

LAST Lord's-day we spoke about being in the fear of God all the day long, and I am afraid some thought, "The pastor has set a very high standard before us; not too high, but still far above what we have been able to reach." I know that many desires after holiness were excited, and many longings of heart went up to heaven. It ought to be so as soon as the truth is received into the mind. Note the context: "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple"; and then the next step is intensity of desire: "I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments." When we have light enough to see what holiness is, and how desirable it is, then we should hunger and thirst after it. To be holy is to go to the University; to have a desire for it is to go to a preparatory school for children, and to labour and agonize for it is to go to the grammar school. I want to teach the young children, and get them ready for that grammar school, that their course may be clear for the university of actual holiness of life. I shall not take you to the grammar school of strong desire with the view of your stopping there, but that I may coach you up, by God's good Spirit, for the university of attainment, where you will be "in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

Here we have David desiring, praying, pleading, and setting forth very clearly what he pants after. May you and I have the same burning desires: may we pant; may we thirst; and at the same time may we clearly know what we are panting for, so that we may the more intelligently pursue it, and thus go the nearer way to obtain it! May the Holy Spirit, the author of holiness, help us in our meditations upon these three verses!

In the first verse you have the Psalmist *longing intently after holiness*: "I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments." In the next verse you have David *pleading fervently for the*

thing that he desired, praying in this fashion, "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name." In the third verse you have the same man of God *enlarging intelligently upon what it was that he pleaded for*, giving both the positive and the negative side of it: "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

I. First, then, we will think of LONGING ARDENTLY AFTER HOLINESS: "I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments."

Observe carefully that *the man of God longed for the Lord's commandments*. This cannot mean anything else than that he longed to know them, longed to keep them, longed to teach them, longed to bring all around him into obedience to them. Many religious people long after the promises, and they do well; but they must not forget to have an equal longing for the commandments. It is a sad sign when a man cannot bear to hear of the precepts, but must always have the preacher touching the string of privileges. To the renewed man it is a privilege to receive a command from the Lord whom he serves, and a great grace to have the will and the power to obey it. To us grace means a power which sways us, as well as a favour which distinguishes us. To me the greatest privilege in all the world would be perfect holiness. If I had my choice of all the blessings I can conceive of, I would choose perfect conformity to the Lord Jesus, or, in one word, holiness. I do not think I should have made Solomon's choice of "wisdom," unless it included wisdom of moral and spiritual character, and that is holiness. I said to a young girl the other day, "Are you perfect?" She answered that it was her greatest desire to be so, though she had not yet attained it. Just so; and that hallowed desire shows which way the heart is going. No unrenewed heart ever sighed and cried after holiness. A mere passing wish is of but little worth: I am speaking of the intense and continual desire of the heart. We must strive after holiness with an agony of desire. Oh, to be rid of every sin! What is that but heaven? Oh, to clean escape from every tendency to it, and from every trace of it! This would be bliss. What more of happiness could we desire than to fulfil that word of our Lord—"Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"? Are you conscious of great longings to escape from sin? Do you feel far less dread of hell than of sin? Is sin the worst of hells to you? Is it horrible, terrible, killing? Would it be the heaviest punishment that could be laid upon you if the Great Judge should say, "You are filthy; be filthy still. You are unholy; be unholy still"? It would certainly be the worst of deaths to some of us. The deepest prayer of our hearts is to be delivered from that inbred sin which is the tinder in which the sparks of temptation find fuel. We long to be delivered from that law in our members which brings us into captivity to sin. Oh, that we could be like him who said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me"! How wonderful! "Nothing in me"! Alas! the evil prince finds very much of his own in most of us. One of the best men I ever knew said, at eighty years of age, "I find the old man is not dead yet." Our old man is crucified, but he is long a-dying. He is not dead when we think he is. You may

live to be very old; but you will have need still to watch against the carnal nature, which remains even in the regenerate. I heard one speak about feeling angry when provoked, and he said "he felt a bone of the old man moving." Alas! there is more than a bone of it in us, there is the whole body of this death still left; and very palpable, very substantial it does seem to be at times, so that we are forced to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" We need deliverance, not from the bones of it, but from the very body of it which still plagues us. In those longings you see which way the stream of your heart is flowing. These longings of your spirit that you may fully observe the divine commandments—these desires, I say, show that you have a clean heart and a right spirit, a heart which would do good, though evil is present with you. The tide is running in the right way, though the wind may be blowing against it. Being born of God, you do not commit sin as the tenor of your life; but you strive after that which is pure and good.

Now, observe that the Psalmist, having told us what he longed for, *shows the strength of those desires;* for he had been so eager in his pursuit of holiness that he had lost his breath. He could not find among men a good figure to describe himself, and so he looked among animals, and he selected the panting stag as his crest. The hart has been hunted over hill and dale; the dogs have long been close behind it; it has fled, as with the wings of a swift eagle, from their murderous teeth. For a moment it has eluded them. It pauses; it longs to bathe itself in the water-brook. It is hot, and weary, and thirsty, and therefore opens wide its mouth. See how it pants! Mark how its breast heaves and its whole body palpitates while it tries to regain its breath! The poor hunted thing is exhausted with its desperate efforts. Have not we also at times felt spent in the struggle against sin? We have not yet resisted unto blood; but we have said to ourselves, "What more can we do? This fierce temptation returns: we may yet be overthrown by it. Oh, that we could take to ourselves wings and fly away! Woe is unto us, for we have no strength." You were like a man who is out of breath: you were striving beyond yourself after "life more abundantly." Accursed is that man who has exhausted body and mind in the race of sin: from that curse he can only escape by looking to Jesus, who was made a curse for us. But blessed is that man who has spent all the energy of his being in following after righteousness; for out of weakness he shall be made strong. When he cries, "My foot slippeth," the mercy of the Lord shall hold him up. When, like David in the battle with the giant, he waxes faint, the Lord shall cover his head. Meanwhile he opens his mouth, and pants out his weariness; but the Lord is with him, and he will preserve him alive. Are you ready to faint this morning? Underneath are the everlasting arms. He that faints in such a pursuit as this, shall swoon away upon the bosom of his Lord. Be of good comfort.

See, next, *how resolved he was.* He says, "I opened my mouth, and panted." He is eager to go onward. Worn out by previous effort, he does not lie down to die, but is determined to be still on the move.

Give up the struggle? Never! My brethren, we have drawn the sword against the Canaanites of sin, and we will never sheathe it until the last of them is slain. It may be a life-long battle, but we will never make truce or treaty with sin. Woe unto him who says of holiness, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." We must never degrade ourselves by saying, "This form of sin cannot be conquered, for it is constitutional: as it was bred in my bone it must be allowed to come out in my flesh." Brethren, we allow no excuse for ourselves. We will not plead for the life of a single sin.

"Yes, my Redeemer, they shall die;
My heart has so decreed:
Nor will I spare the guilty things
That made my Saviour bleed."

Oh, for the holy fury of a sanctified iconoclast, who will spare nothing which is opposed to God! We are called to break in pieces every idol, to cast down every grove, and to overthrow every altar; that Jehovah may be God alone in the land. I charge you, never temporize with sin: abhor the idea of compromise with error and with evil. If you say, "I will only sin so far," you might as well say, "I will only take so much poison, or stab myself a few inches deep." Alas! you have given up the fight when you have come to terms with the foe. A hot temper may be natural, but it must be conquered. A niggardly spirit may be inborn, but it must be cast out. A proud mind may be a family heritage, but it must be laid low. Certain weeds may be indigenous to the soil of your nature, and therefore it may be doubly difficult to extirpate them; but the work must be done. Keep the hoe going; never cease from the determination to uproot the last of them. Even though you open your mouth and pant with weariness, yet keep your face set like a flint towards holiness, and let your case be that of one who is "faint, yet pursuing."

Note that the follower after holiness *seeks renewed strength*. Why does he open his mouth and pant? Is it not to get more air, to fill his lungs again, to cool his blood, and to be ready to renew his running? When you have an hour's retirement from the battle against sin, spend it in furbishing your shield, and sharpening your sword; for another assault will soon be upon you. We *can* become strong again. "He giveth more grace." We are never, for a moment, to suppose that we have exhausted the strength of God when we have exhausted our own. We ought to be all the more earnest to draw upon divine all-sufficiency. We are to be like that fabled giant, whom Hercules could not overcome for a long while, because he was a child of the earth, and every time he was thrown down he touched his mother earth, and rose with fresh strength. Hercules had to hold him aloft in his arms, and there strangle him. Now, whenever you are thrown down and touch your God in your faintness and weakness, you will find that he restoreth your soul: "To them that have no might he increaseth strength." When cast down we cry, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise." "When I am weak, then am I strong." May we realize the truth of that Christian paradox!

Brethren, *we can* overcome sin in the power of the Lord. The Canaanites have chariots of iron, but Christ has a rod of iron, with which he can break them in pieces. Sin is strong, but grace is stronger. Satan is wise, but God is all-wise. The Lord is on our side, therefore let us open our mouth wide and take in another draught of heaven's reviving air; let us bathe in the water of life; let us drink from the smitten rock, and in thus waiting upon the Lord we shall renew our strength. Hath he not said, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it"? When our desires are after the best things, we may expect the Lord to meet with us, and grant us times of refreshing from his presence. In remembrance of these visitations, and the time of intense desire which preceded them, we can say, "I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments."

The Psalmist was *dissatisfied with his attainments*. Brethren, may we never be content with ourselves. We are satisfied with the Word of God; we are satisfied with the gospel of God; we are satisfied with the favour of God; we are satisfied with the Christ of God; but we shall never be satisfied with our own personal condition till we wake up in the likeness of the First-born Son. Satisfaction with self is the death of progress. He that is not content with his place in the race will push forward; but he that is proud of his position in the running will soon flag and fall behind. Like the man on the bicycle, we must keep going; to stop is to drop. On! On! On! You are only safe as the wheel spins round, and you throw the miles behind you. My text is not the utterance of one who is sitting in his arm-chair, with the motto on the wall behind him, "Rest and be thankful." As for the man who feels as the Psalmist did, his mind is far away, in the land beyond him. His opened mouth and panting heart betoken desires which are not as yet fulfilled.

Yet, let no tinge of discouragement mingle with your dissatisfaction: *this man is hopeful of better things*. He opens his mouth because he looks for something to fill it; he pants because he believes in water-brooks which will relieve his thirst. Wise men will only pant for that which it is possible to attain. We are not Quixotical; we have set out on no romantic expedition. We do not shoot at the moon, nor aim at an absurd ideal. We are not even rash, like those who seek the North Pole, and risk their lives for a dream. Brethren, God can make us holy. Few of us have any adequate idea of what we may become even here by divine grace. The possibilities of sanctification are seldom explored; but the mass of professors are content with small things in this direction. When a man asks me, "Can I be perfect?" and looks as if he would lead me into a debate upon the subject, I try to find out what manner of man he is before I answer him. If he is worldly, given to appetite, an angry man, a hard man, a proud man, or a lover of his own supremacy, I smile at the question as coming from him. I picture to myself a man who slept under a hedge last night, whose pockets are full of emptiness, whose clothes would disgrace a rag-bag, out at elbows, and beggarly; and this gentleman wishes to discuss with me the question—Is great wealth attainable by an ordinary working man? I cannot see what the question has to do with him. He of the rag-bag says, "You

know, sir, we cannot all acquire ten thousand a year." "No, my dear fellow, it would seem that we cannot all save ten pence, much less ten thousand a year. Had you not better get a pair of shoes for your feet before you talk about thousands? These are great words from a very little man." When you are not doing what you might do, why speculate about what is possible or impossible? When a man has not enough grace to make change for a sixpence, he may waive all question about the millions of spiritual perfection. Do you cry, "Can I be perfect"? I answer, leave that question until you are much further on the way to it than you are now. Do not be distressed by the fear that you may by accident become better than you should be. I will insure against that calamity at a very low rate. Have faith in God, and say, in his name, "If perfect holiness be possible, I will have it: if it can be reached on earth, I will reach it." All that the Spirit of God can make out of such a poor sinner as I am it is my desire that he should make. I gladly submit myself, and all that I have, to his gracious operation. Brethren, do you not say the same? I would like to have a very dissatisfied congregation at this time: I wish that everybody here would go out of this Tabernacle grumbling at himself. I would like to hear each one say, "It will not do: I must get out of this; I must rise to a higher condition: I must be more Christ-like. I must have less and less of self." Brethren, may we be burning with an insatiable desire to be holy; and may we say with the inspired penman, "I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments."

II. Desire, where it is real, will soon embody itself in prayer. Hence we find the Psalmist PLEADING FERVENTLY FOR THE HOLINESS HE DESIRED. Here are his breathings: "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name."

You see, dear friends, *he believes in God's power to bless him*, and hence he turns to him, and cries, "Look thou upon me." Is that all? Is a look sufficient? Hearken to me, and I will show you that there is much in a look. Is it not written, "Look unto me, and be ye saved"?—that is our look to God. If our looking to God saves us, what will not God's looking at us do? If there is so much power received by the eye of faith, how much will be given by the glance of love from God? Think not little of a look from God. A look—only a look! Ay, but it is from HIM. Remember what a look from Christ did for Peter. He did but look on him, and swearing Peter turned to weeping Peter in a moment. Great sinners may be grateful for a look, for it is more than they deserve. Great saints may rejoice in a look; for it means much when the eye which looks is the eye of Omnipotent Love. "Look thou upon me." The favour of God is a choice means of sanctification. While affliction is greatly used of God to cleanse the heart, yet a very noble, soul-filling sense of the love of God is the truest sanctifier in the hand of the Holy Spirit. If you know that God loves you with an everlasting love, you will love the Lord, and hate every false way. If you walk in the light of his countenance, you will walk in the way of his commandments. If God's love is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, like sweet perfume, your life will be fragrant with it. It will become

natural for you to please him who loves you infinitely and immutably. Blessed is that man upon whom God looks; I mean, looks with an eye of favourable regard. Lord, look on me, and say, by that look, "I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine"; and this will cause me to keep in thy way! That is what the Psalmist is here praying for. The Lord can sanctify us with a look of love. His choice makes us choice: his love fills us with love.

Observe that the pleader *appeals to mercy*. Let me draw your attention to the text, "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me." To be delivered from the power of sin is the greatest of mercies. Sin is a misery from which we can only be saved by mercy. "Be merciful unto me." We have no claim upon the Lord by way of merit; our appeal is to his sovereign grace. We have no rights—these we forfeited by our treason against our King. We plead, as the courts say, "*in formâ pauperis*," or as the poor man seeks help from pity. Our appeal is *ad misericordiam*—to mercy and compassion. When you come before God in prayer, seeking sanctification, base your request upon his mercy—"Lord, thou hast done much for me; do still more, and make me holy. I have not profited by thy discipline as I ought to have done; but deal with me in patience. I am poor material for the potter's skill; but exercise thy long-suffering, and bear with me, and go on with thy work of grace until thou hast made me a vessel fit for thy use." It is truest, wisest, safest, for us to appeal to mercy. The best of saints are sinners still, and sinners always need mercy.

Then *he pleads as one who loves God*. He asks God to deal with him, saying, "As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name"—implying that he is one of them. Come, dear friends, are you of the number of the lovers of the Lord? Do you love God's name?—that is to say, his character and his revealed will? "Ay, that I do," cries one, "God is my exceeding joy, and I delight in his law after the inward man. His holiness was once terrible to me, but now I admire it, and delight in it. Oh, that I were a partaker of it to the full!" You see the man's character by the way in which his heart takes its pleasure. If any man truly loves God he will grow like God. The revealed character of God is to some of us a joy for ever; and this is a sure mark of grace. We are not what we ought to be; we are not what we want to be; we are not what we hope to be; we are not what we shall be; but we do love the name of the Lord, and this is the root of the matter. We shall be like him, for we love him. Thus the very fact that the Lord has filled us with love to himself, is a plea for further grace to keep his commandments.

The Psalmist employs *the grand plea of use and wont;* for, says he, "As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name." Use and wont generally have great weight in a court of law. A friend said to me, "How will such a suit go? The case has never been before a court until now?" I answered, "Are you sure that what was done is according to universal and long-continued custom? for, if so, though there be no law, the custom of the trade will stand." Custom among men reaching far back holds good in court; how much shall the custom of the eternally unchanging God decide his future acts! The Psalmist pleads the Lord's own custom; and this is a grand plea with him,

because he is unchanging. Whatever he has done he will do; and his having done it is a pledge that he will do it again, unless there is any declaration to the contrary. The Psalmist seems to say, "Thou art in the habit of helping those that love thy name; Lord, help me. It is the way of thee to sanctify thy people; Lord, sanctify me. When saints desire to be holy, thou art accustomed to grant their desires; Lord, grant mine, for I have the same desires." Is not this a good plea—"Be merciful to me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name"? If you think it a good plea, urge it at the throne.

This involves another fact: *he joyfully accepts God's method.* When you cry to God to help you in your overcoming of sin, you must consent that he shall do it in his own way. Now, if it be his will that sanctification should involve chastisement, are you willing to take it? "Oh, yes!" say you, "Lord, do unto me as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name; and if it be written, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten,' Lord, rebuke and chasten me, so long as thou dost but love me." We kiss the rod, because the Father who uses it deigns to kiss us. We assent to the processes of grace that we may enjoy the results of grace. It may so happen that if God sanctifies you, he may have to grind you very small: cheerfully yield yourself to the mill. If this is the way in which he deals with those that love his name, do not desire any different treatment. As the result, you may become a butt for the ridicule of ungodly men; but of this do not complain; for this has frequently happened unto those that love his name. God sanctifies his people, but not without their own effort in that direction: be you willing to make the effort too. Say, "Lord, I will breakfast with thy children, I will dine with thy children, I will sup with thy children, and I will go to bed with thy children, hoping to rise with thy children. Lord, take me into thy house, and treat me, not as a stranger or a guest, but as a child. I do not ask for the best bedroom, nor to have a special feast made for me; but I would share the daily bread of thy little ones. If thou treatest thy children so-and-so, treat me the same, and I will be grateful. I do not ask to go to heaven without enduring tribulation on the road. I would not pray to be exempted from the general description—'These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" We would not have less than the family of love, and we cannot desire more. It is enough for a sheep to be fed with the flock, for a child to fare like the rest of the family. Do you see where we have come to? Our prayer is that God would make us holy—holy through his favour, holy through his own gracious working; but we leave methods in God's hands: let him take his own way, his tried way, his ordinary way, his fixed way; only let him deal mercifully with us as he uses to do unto those that love his name. Let no one of us demand exemption from the customary tests and trials.

> "Must I be carried to the skies
> On flowery beds of ease;
> While others fought to win the prize,
> And sail'd through bloody seas?"

Do you expect to be crowned without warfare? to be rewarded without labour? You expect what you will never have. Give up such idle

dreams, and plead the prayer of my text: "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name."

III. I thank you for your deep attention: it is greatly helpful to me in my feeble state. Will you bear with me while I conduct you to the third head, which is this: we see the Psalmist ENLARGING INTELLIGENTLY UPON THE FAVOUR HE SEEKS. It is a good thing to come before the Lord with a prepared prayer. "A prepared prayer!" cries one. "Would you have us write out our prayers and learn them?" I did not say, or even think of such a thing; but for a man to drop on his knees and to imagine that he can at once pray acceptably without a preparatory thought, is for him to deceive himself. The best prayer is when a man waits a little and considers, "What do I want?" If I had an invitation to visit the Queen, and was told that I might ask whatever I pleased of her Majesty, I should prepare my request. If I wished to make the most of the interview, I should reflect, and set my petition in order. I might ask amiss; I might ask for something inconsistent, or something unfit for royalty to bestow; I should therefore turn my prayer over. When you go before God, it is well to know what you are in need of. Our older brethren used to say in prayer, "We would not rush into thy presence as the unthinking horse rushes into the battle." I suppose they would not; for, as a rule, they did not make much of a rush at anything. I do not wish to quote the old-fashioned remark so as to revive it, for I have often wished that the old horse had been put into an omnibus, and worked to death. Horses are not expected to think, and therefore the term, an unthinking horse, was needless. Still, there is something in what the expression meant: we must not go before God without thought and reverent preparedness of heart and mind.

Now, let us see how the Psalmist puts it. His cry is for holiness, and *he describes it as being ruled by the word of God.* "Order my steps in thy word." The different sects have differing ideas of holiness, but the reality of holiness is only one. It is this—"Order my steps in thy word." If we believe God's Word we are orthodox; if we practise it we are holy. This Book is the great umpire as to conduct, and not the changing moral sentiment of passing generations. Pray God to order your life according to his Word. To this Word we must be conformed. This is our copy to write by: this is the image to which we must be modelled.

He would have holiness in every step of his life—"Order my steps in thy word." It is not, "Lord, order my journey as a whole," but, "Order my steps." We lose a great deal by lumping things: in the matter of holiness detail is all-important. Brethren, I would not only preach a holy sermon, but I desire that every word may be a holy word, every sentence a right sentence. As you believe in verbal inspiration for the Bible, so pray for verbal guidance in your speech, and minute direction in your actions. The whole book of life will be excellent when every line and every letter is ordered according to the Word of the Lord. When we are careless as to the parts we spoil the whole.

Notice that *he would have every step ordered.* "*Order* my steps." We wish to put the right foot foremost; but the right foot to move may not always be that which is called the right. The left foot may sometimes be the right, and we must not take things for granted. We wish to put down our right foot in the right place, at the right time, with the right degree of force, and turned in the right direction. A great deal of holiness depends upon order, punctuality, and proportion. If order is not heaven's *first* law, it is certainly one of its laws; and proportion is another. Some men's lives are out of perspective. Do you remember Hogarth's caricature of a picture without perspective, wherein a man appears to be fishing in a river, but is really standing far away from it; a sparrow in a tree looks like a huge eagle, and a man on the top of a hill is borrowing a light from a candle held out of the window of a house down below on the other side of the river. Without perspective, good drawing is impossible; and without proportion a complete life is impossible. A man may be, in many points, a good man; you may say of him, bit by bit, "Yes, *that* is good, and *that* is good"; and yet he may have so much of one virtue, that it may become a vice, and he may have so little of another virtue that it may be a grave defect. We can never attain to the right proportion of the virtues unless the Lord himself arranges them in order for us. Do not tell me it is easy to be holy: you want not only the different graces, but all these in order due and measure fit. O Lord, help us! Order our steps.

We remark that *he would have every step full of God:* he would have each one ordered of the Lord. He would receive his strength, his motives, his guiding influences direct from the Lord: "Order my steps in thy word." Lord, when I put my foot down there, may it be at thine order; and when I move it to another place, may it still be at thy command. Whether here or there, may I only step where thou dost appoint. Let me go nowhere apart from thy divine guidance and command. "Well," cries one, "this is difficult." But, my brother, although obedience may not be easy it is free from the far greater difficulties which accompany self-will. A child who will do nothing but what his father commands does not find his course difficult; the difficulty comes in when he wants to follow his own will, and to have his own way. You cannot serve God and self: if you try it, the mixture is nauseous and injurious. Say, "Lord, I would consult thee about everything I think, or say, or do; for then that which I do will not have to be undone, that which I say will not be wished unsaid, and that which I think will not have to be wept over. 'Order my steps in thy word.' Put me under orders, keep me under orders, and never let me escape thine orders."

Observe that the last part of the verses is the negative way of describing holiness: "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." *He would be wholly delivered from the tyranny of sin.* Many men are violent against one sin; but the true saint abhors all sin. You are a teetotaler; I am very glad to hear it: you will not allow the sin of drunkenness to have dominion over you. But are you selfish and ungenerous? Have you learned habits of strict economy in regard to religious donations, so that you always give a penny where you

ought to give a pound? What have you done? You have only changed your idols. You have dethroned one usurper to set up another. If you were once profane, and are now hypocritical, you have only changed iniquities. It is a very curious thing how one sin feeds on another: the death of profligacy may be the resurrection of greed; the flight of pride may be the advent of shameless folly. The man who was lewd, riotous, brawling, and irreligious has killed those sins, and on their graves he has sown a handful of a poisonous weed called pride, and it flourishes amazingly. It may be London pride, country pride, or English pride, or American pride; but it is rare stuff to grow, and to grow over the rotting carcases of other sins. Unbelief may dethrone superstition, but its own reign may be no real improvement upon that of credulity. If you only throw down Baal to set up Ashtaroth, what progress have you made towards God? Little does it signify which of the false gods is set up in the temple of Jehovah, for he hates them all. The right prayer is, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." Some sins are of respectable repute, and other sins are disreputable among men; but to a child of God every sin is loathsome. Sins are all what Bunyan calls Diabolonians, and not one of them must be suffered to live in the town of Mansoul. "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." I can see the throne set up within the heart of man. Who shall sit on it? It cannot be empty; who shall fill it? This sin, that sin, or the other? Nay, Lord, help me to keep every intruder out of it. Whether he come as an angel of light, or in his true character as the devil, help me to treat everyone as an enemy that would seek to supplant thee in thy dominion over me. Oh, that God may reign over us from morn to eve, through every day of every week of every year!

"Let not any iniquity have dominion over me," is a prayer against the reign of sin. Sin will attack us, but sin shall not subdue us; for it is written, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." You may put up "*Trespassers, beware!*" But the trespassers will come, do what you may; still, they shall not be allowed to acquire a right of way through our nature. If a bird flies over our head, we cannot help it; but we will not let it make its nest in our hair. So a temptation may pass by us, an evil imagination may flit over the mind; but we will not invite evil, nor patiently endure it, nor allow it to lodge in our souls. Our bosom's throne is for the King of kings, Jesus, the Bridegroom of our hearts.

This is our prayer: "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." I fear that many professors have never understood this prayer. One man is a splendid man for a prayer-meeting, a fine man for a Bible-class; but at home he is a tyrant to his wife and children. Is not this a great evil under the sun? Another man is stern and honest, and he inveighs with all his might against every form of evil, but he is hard even to cruelty with all who are in his power. One is generous and fervent, but he likes a sly drop; another is good-natured and pleasant, but he puts it on in his bills at times, and his customers do not find the goods quite of the quality they pay for. I have known a man who would not work on the Sabbath, but then he never worked on the other six days; and another who never broke the Sabbath,

but he broke many hearts by his unkindness. Beware of pet sins. If you let a golden god rule you, you will perish as well as if you let a mud god rule you. Be this your constant cry—"Let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

I have done when I say just this. I have been describing these longings, but thus I have only been taking you to that preparatory school, of which I spoke at the commencement. Already some of you are saying, "I do not think I shall make a rapid scholar even at this preparatory school." The first thing you have to do is to see that you have these longings strong within you. If you have them, thank God for them. To pant and pine after holiness is infinitely better than to be self-righteous. Cultivate these desires and cravings.

But, in the next place, never rest content with mere longings. He that really longs is not content to long: he desires to have his desire fulfilled. The only way to be holy—you that have not begun—is to go to a holy God through the holy Mediator. Trust in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, and so be reconciled to God by him who alone can put away sin. Then go again to Jesus, and ask him to renew you in the spirit of your mind, and wash you with water from the power of sin, as he has washed you with blood from the guilt of it. When you are washed, take care that you keep your garments unspotted from the world. When you have once known the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, do not return again to folly. Follow on watchfully and resolutely. Seek the daily renewing of the Holy Spirit, and so shall you go from strength to strength till you shall be like your Lord, and shall see him as he is.

May God bless my feeble words, and put power into them for your eternal good, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxix. 119—136.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—42, 119 (Song II.), 119 (Song III.)

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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THREE IMPORTANT PRECEPTS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 13TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, June 22nd, 1890.

"Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way."—Proverbs xxiii. 19.

THE words are very direct and personal; and that is what I wish my sermon to be. My soul is more and more set upon immediate conversions. I have no voice with which to play the orator; I have only enough strength to be an earnest pleader with your souls. I want to come to close quarters with you, and to plead with each man and woman here as if there were but one. Specially would I press my entreaties upon the young, that they may immediately begin that blessed walk which will lead them to the right hand of God. Here and now, I desire your salvation. I may never preach again, and you may never hear me again. "Now is the accepted time."

Solomon, in this verse, gave forth three precepts. I am not very careful as to what limited meaning he personally attached to his words. I am going to baptize his precepts into the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. I shall put into them a fulness of gospel meaning, and I shall press them home upon the heart, praying the Holy Spirit to lead every unconverted person to whom these words shall come, to obey these three precepts at once. My voice is to each one. I think I have a message from God for thee, and for thee. Be not disobedient to the heavenly summons.

The first precept in my text is "*Hear*"; and the second is, "*Be wise*"; and the third is, "*Guide thine heart in the way.*"

I. We will begin with the first precept, which is contained in the word "HEAR." Perhaps you will say, "We are all here ready to hear, and do not, therefore, need the exhortation." That you are in this great audience-chamber in the posture of attention is a matter in which I rejoice. So far, so good. But let me say to you, this exhortation to hear is not only given in this verse, but it is often

repeated in Holy Scripture. "Hear, O Israel!" is the voice of the law and of the prophets. This is not optional: it is a matter of command and promise. "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good." The very existence of a revelation is a call to hear it. You cannot find eternal life through the eye of the body. No actual brazen serpent is to be looked upon. You need not now look for solemn ceremonies, bleeding sacrifices, and smoking incense. These shadows have vanished. The high road of truth to the heart runs through the ear. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The apostolic word is, "Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken unto me."

The exhortation to hear is a very important one. As I understand it and use it at this time it means, *hear the gospel.* "Take heed what ye hear." There is only one way of salvation. Mind that you hear the one and only gospel. Be very careful of your Sundays: you will not have many of them. Do not go on the Sabbath to hear whatever comes in your way, or you may hear to your ruin. Go to hear *the gospel.* "How shall I know where the gospel is preached?" Well, you will not have to enquire long: you may readily judge for yourself. Unless the name of Jesus is sounded out often, depend upon it you are in the wrong place. Unless you hear the words "grace," "faith," "salvation," you may conclude that you are not on gospel ground. It is true that mere terms may not always be a sufficient guide; but, as a rule, as straws show which way the wind blows, so will these terms, by their presence or absence, be a guide to you. It will not take you long to find out whether the man preaches of works or grace, ceremonies or faith, man or Christ. You can soon discover the gospel sermon or the moral essay, for the very temperature of them differs. Mere morality teaches men to dance, but it does not discern the fact that they have lost their legs. The gospel gives the lame man his feet, and then shows him how to use them. You need a Saviour: you do not want to be deluded with some theory of saving yourself. Go where you hear about the Lord Jesus and his redeeming blood. If you hear no mention of "the blood," clear out of the place, and never go again.

When you have found out the gospel-house, take care that you *hear with the view of obtaining faith in the Lord Jesus.* Aim at that blessed thing. "Faith cometh by hearing." It will be idle for you to stop at home, and say, "I will try to believe." This is unreasonable, and not according to the laws of mind. It is folly to attempt to try to believe; there is a far better way. Go and hear what it is which you are to believe, and, as you hear it, if it be faithfully told out, and if the preacher is, in his own person, a witness to the truth, you will be greatly helped in the matter of believing. Faith comes of knowledge and evidence, and hearing brings you these. Besides, there is a power about the gospel which tends to create faith, and the Holy Spirit is pleased to use the foolishness of preaching to breed faith, and so to save them that believe. If the gospel be allowed to work in its own way, the most unbelieving mind will soon yield itself to faith. The persons who do not believe the Bible, as a rule, have

never read it. Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, as a rule, know nothing about him; while, for certain, those who know his gospel best, find it easy to believe. A frequent hearer is likely to become a fervent believer. Do not fall into the error of some, who only patronize the house of God occasionally, and think they are doing something very meritorious. If you are often hearing with an earnest mind you will not fail to get the blessing. He that only eats once a month will not grow very strong; and he that only hears the gospel now and then, is not likely to be profited. Beware of hearing sermons as a pastime: this is no trifling matter. Hear the gospel with the view of being saved by it.

Next, *hear without prejudice.* The Word of God does not please some people. That is not at all wonderful; for many people ought not to be pleased. Some have a preconceived idea of what the plan of salvation ought to be. They are in no humour to receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save their souls; but their object is to find fault with the preacher, to pick a hole in his doctrine, or in his manner. They must have something or other to criticize or censure. Do you wonder that such folks are not profited? They do not hear; but they sit in judgment. I have read that in the reign of Queen Elizabeth there was a law made that everybody should go to his parish church; but many sincere Romanists loathed to go and hear Protestant doctrine. Through fear of persecution, they attended the parish church; but they took care to fill their ears with wool, so that they should not hear what their priests condemned. It is wretched work preaching to a congregation whose ears are stopped with prejudices. Are there not many such? The world, the flesh, the devil, the priests, the sceptics, and the down-graders have stopped their ears, and what good is likely to come of their attendance? If you come to carp at everything, how are you likely to be blessed? Hear! Hear! Hear what God the Lord will speak, and there will be a message of peace for your soul. I would say, like the old pleader, "Strike, but hear!" Abuse me, but hear me. Do not shut the door of mercy against yourself.

Next, I would say, *hear for yourself.* The great object of a hearer should be to hear what God speaks *to him.* I am glad that God should speak to my neighbour; but my neighbour must listen for himself, and not for me. The Roman orator began—

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears."

He needs much the loan; for people usually lend their ears to one another, and not to the speaker. They will sit and wonder what Mrs. So-and-so thinks of the sermon: it is so pat for her. Leave her alone, friend! Think about what is pat for yourself. Do you not know that in every sermon there is something for yourself, and your first duty is to give heed to that which is for you? Come with me to a house. A will is to be read. A dozen people have come home from the funeral, and they are going to hear the will read. Perhaps they cried a good deal at the funeral; but they will not cry now, if the person they have buried has left a decent sum among them. They are all ear for what the lawyer has to read. They want to hear that will

much more than many want to hear a sermon. See how they listen! There are long, ugly words about tenements and hereditaments, and this, and that, and the other; but they set themselves to hear it all as much as if it were a choice poem. Are they going to sleep? By no means. John Smith over yonder, the man's brother; see how he doubles his attention at a certain point! As for the eldest son, how eagerly he drinks in about all the farm and messuage, and freehold land, and such like, all in the parish of A., in the county of B.! It takes a long time to go through it, but each legatee loves every word which relates to him. He listens, and his ears seem to grow longer while he hears. That poor relative who gets nineteen guineas lays the codicil to heart, and can almost repeat it word for word, only wishing it had been five hundred pounds. John Smith does not care so much about the rest of the document; in fact, he hopes there are not many more items. The extract which relates to himself he would like to copy out. Will you be wise enough to treat a sermon in that fashion? Please listen to that which concerns you most, take it down, and carry it home. This is the exhortation of the text—"*Hear;*" but especially hear that which has most to do with you, whether it be rebuke, or promise, or command.

And then, dear friends, *hear when the sermon is done.* "How can I hear when it is all done?" This is a very important point. I went to see a poor woman in the hospital one day, and she said to me, speaking of the sermons she had heard, "Sir, you seem to talk to me all day and all night while I am lying here." I said, "Well, I hope I do not keep you awake." "No," she said, "but as I am awake I hear you talking to me through everything I see. You have used so many things as illustrations, that everywhere I have you in my memory." I was pleased, and inwardly wished that I could always preach in the way which she described; and I should do so if I always had hearers such as that sick woman had evidently been. Ah, dear friends! the way to hear a sermon is to hear it when you get home. Pray remember my sermon of this morning, "Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long."* I want you to hear that word when you are dressing to-morrow, when you are taking down the shutters, when you are dealing across the counter, and when you are among the children. If you are tempted to do a dishonest deed, I would have you hear a still small voice saying to you, "Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." A sermon ought to be like a musical box: we wind it up when we preach it, and then it goes on playing till its tune is through. It should be said of a good sermon, "It being ended still speaketh." Hear what you hear in such a way that it shall be like a seed which will grow in the garden of your heart.

Above all, *hear the gospel as the voice of God.* When a man hears the preacher, not as a man speaking on his own account, but as God's servant; and when the truth spoken is not measured by its oratory, nor weighed by its logic, but is judged of by the Bible, as to whether it is the very truth of God or not; then it is that men hear to profit. Those who compare sermons with Scripture are noble, like the Bereans

* "All the Day Long." Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 2,150.

of old. If you can say, "I hear the word, not as the word of man, but as the word of God," it will have its effect upon your heart. Oh, that the word may come to you with demonstration of the Spirit! You will never lose the good effect of gospel preaching if the Spirit of God seals it on your mind. Is it so, or not? Do you come here to listen to *me?* Yours is a poor errand. If you come to listen to what God the Lord shall speak, however poorly I may interpret his mind as I find it in the Scripture, yet you will find a blessing in what you hear. A good many things are sold nowadays by means of pretty wrappings, and in the same way worthless doctrines are spread by the fine style in which they are done up. But as you do not want the wrappings, but the goods, so in sermons, the manner is not the main concern. If we should set a thing before you with all the grandeur of oratory, and it did not come from God, it would be a gaudy nothing. Though we spoke falsehood with the tongues of men and of angels, we should not be so good as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. But though we give you the gospel of the blessed God, in great feebleness and trembling, yet it is what you want, and through it the blessing will come to you. He that hath an ear towards God will find that God hath an ear towards him.

Thus have we dwelt upon the first exhortation. Hear often. Hear the gospel. Hear for yourself. Hear attentively. Hear with a holy purpose. Hear the gospel as a message from God.

II. The next precept is, "BE WISE." What does that mean in this connection?

It means, first, *try to understand what you hear.* Get to the bottom of it. Look it up; look it down; look it through. Look over it, but do not overlook it. When you have heard the words of the gospel, say to yourself, "I would know what this gospel is. With the ins and outs of it I am going to make myself acquainted, if the Lord will teach me. I will know what I must do to be saved, and why I must do it, and how it will save me." How much I wish that a sacred curiosity would seize upon my hearers, so that they would say, "We must know the soul and spirit of this Word of the Lord. We want to know, each one for himself, who the Saviour is, and how he can be ours"! God give you thus to be wise, by getting an understanding of the gospel! I should not wonder, if I were to come round the congregation, if I found many here who do not know the gospel, simple as it is. I will not come round, so do not be frightened; but I sadly fear that some of you, who have been for years to places of worship, are still ignorant of the elements of the faith. Should it be so? Do try to know saving truth. Whatever else you do not learn, do learn the answer to that question, "What must I do to be saved?"

Next, "Be wise": that is, *believe the gospel as it comes from God.* You will not be wise to doubt it; but you will be wise to believe it, for it is true, and sure. This is an age of doubt; it is in the air. No man is, nowadays, thought to have any sense if he does not doubt even the best established truths: and yet I do not think that it takes any great quantity of brain to be a doubter. With a very strong effort, I might manage to doubt—to doubt my father's word (I have never done it, mark you!); to doubt my brother's faithfulness;

to doubt my wife's love to me. By such efforts I should doubt myself into an abyss of misery, and should become a glorious fool. To turn the power of doubting upon spiritual realities would be even more fatal; for that would take away my hope beyond the grave, and plunge me in despair. Doubt is sterile; it produces nothing; it destroys, but it cannot create. I have long been a believer, and I find that my joys all come to me by the road of believing, and none of them by the wretched lane of doubting. I have believed this Bible to be God's Word; and after all the destructive criticism which I have heard, I still believe it. I have believed Christ to be my Saviour; and after all the doubts of his Deity and atonement lately vented and invented, I still believe it; ay, and believe it none the less. I have believed God to be my Father; and, though I have seen his Fatherhood dragged in the mire, I still believe it. I believe heaven to be my home; despite the insinuations of Satan, I still believe it. I have never yet gained health, joy, comfort, holiness, through doubting; nay, I have never gained a piece of bread, or a drop of water, through doubting. So many are doing the doubting, and doing it very completely, that I need not trouble myself to assist them, but may quietly go on believing and enjoying the sweet results of faith. Our experience proves that it is wisdom to believe the Lord. He is God that cannot lie. Why should we doubt him?

Next, "be wise": that is, *be affected by what you have heard.* Yield your heart up to the Word of God. Some people are hard to move; they are more like stone than flesh. There are congregations where you may preach your own heart out, but you cannot get at their hearts. You might as well preach to the statues in St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey as preach to them; they are impenetrable and immovable. He that is wise permits the truth to come into full contact with him. Be wise, my hearer! Yield yourself up to the truth; for it will do you good, and no harm. Do not resist it; do not evade it. Let the heavenly wind blow on you; for it brings healing. If it bids you hate sin, hate sin. If it bids you repent, repent. If it entreats you to believe, believe. Be what the gospel is meant to make you. You cannot make yourself a saint; but the Holy Spirit can do it through the word of truth.

And then *take care that you do not wander into evil company.* You say, "Surely you are leaving your text. Why bring that in?" Solomon brought it in. "Hear thou, my son, and be wise. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh"; and so on. If you are wise you will keep out of bad company, especially out of the society of revellers, drunkards, and gluttons. This warning may be very necessary to some to whom this sermon will come. You have lately come from the country to this wicked city. I am sure that you must be very sorry to have come to this horrible wilderness of bricks and mortar. Oh, for an hour or two of the green fields, and the leafy woods, and the blue sky! Alas! designing persons are surrounding you; they are trying to draw you into evil. Be wise. "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Be wise. Keep out of the way of their enticements. In ten years' time, if you have gone into evil company in the interval, you will be yourself the best witness of how

unwise you have been; and if you are kept out of it, kept especially from the wine-cup and vice, I am sure you will thank God that you were wise in time. Choose good companions. Make saints your friends. Trust the true and good, and quit the gay and frivolous.

Once more, "Be wise"; that is, *take care to do what you hear*. Have you never seen persons crowding into a place of worship? Do they not in this place often press upon one another to hear the word? Yes, yes; and when they have come, and they have heard it, what have they done with it? The great mass of them have done nothing with it. Did you ever go to a physician? Did you ever wait in the room for an hour or two before your turn came to see the great man? Did you give him your guinea? Did he hand you a prescription? Tell me, did you leave it on the table? Did you fold it up carefully, and put it into your pocket? Did you keep it there? Did you not have the medicine made up? Did you not take it? Suppose that in a month's time some one should say, "Did you see the doctor?" You say, "Yes, I went to see him." "Did you have a prescription?" "He gave me a bit of paper with something or other upon it; but I do not know what it was, for I cannot read Latin." "You do not mean to say that you have not had it made up at the chemist's?" "No," you say, "I was satisfied with seeing the doctor." Dear friends, you smile at this description of folly; for it is such gross unwisdom. Be wise, then; do not hear the gospel in vain by neglecting its commands. If you know how to be saved, obey the command. Do not be lost in darkness with light shining upon your eyeballs. Do not go to hell with the gate of heaven standing open before you. I pray you, hear and *be wise*. Turn what you hear into speedy practice. God help you to do so, for his mercy's sake!

I am talking to you in a very feeble and commonplace manner; but what more could I say if I had the eloquence of the greatest orator? What better could I do than in a loving and brotherly manner to plead with every one of you not to play the fool with your souls? Hear the gospel, but be not hearers only. Be wise enough to be diligent in practising what you are taught. Believe in Jesus unto life eternal. May the good Spirit make you wise unto salvation! Why will you perish? Why run risks with your never-dying soul? Come now and seek the Lord. If you seek him, he will be found of you.

III. Now comes the last of the three precepts. "GUIDE THINE HEART IN THE WAY."

There is but one way. "In *the* way," mark: that is to say, in the way of wisdom; and this is one, and one only. There are not two Gods, but one God; there are not two Christs, but one Christ; there are not two gospels, but one gospel; there are not two heavens, but one heaven; and there are not two ways of life, but one way. There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," and one Holy Spirit, and one life by his indwelling; and there is no going to heaven by any but the one way. Some people get comparing the different ways of salvation. This is frivolous and foolish; for he that preaches any other than the one gospel is accursed. Suppose a man wants to go to York, and he says, "Well, I want to go to York, but the road to London is a better road, and a wider road." What matters the character of the

road if it does not lead where you want to go? You say you want to go to York; then what have you to do with any road but that which leads to York? There are many ways; but what have you to do with any but the way everlasting? There is one royal road which leads to God, and eternal life, and heaven. Never mind what the other ways are or are not; go you the right way. When I go from this place, I want to go home to Norwood. The road down the Borough is level, but my road home is up a very steep hill to Norwood. Suppose I were to say, "I shall take the level road, and cross London Bridge, and drive into the county of Essex"—what then? Why, I shall not get home if I take any other road than that which leads to the top of Norwood Hill. If it is steep, I cannot help it; but I must say, with John Bunyan at the Hill Difficulty, "This hill, though high, I covet to ascend." So with you, dear friend. There is only one road to heaven; and although there are a dozen roads which do not lead to holiness and God, it is idle to praise them up; for they will not serve your turn. Take the hilly road of Self-denial. Climb up to heaven on your hands and knees, if it must be; but make up your mind that you are going there by God's way.

That way is often described in the Scripture. Shall I tell you what the *Bible* says about this way? Well, it calls it the way of the Lord; and you are not in the right way unless you walk with God day by day. A religion that has not God in it is irreligion. Atheism cannot bring you to heaven, nor can any form of deism, even though it be baptized into the name of Christianity. If God be not Chief, Head, King, Lord, Sovereign, you are not in the right road. It is Christ's way, too; for Christ says, "I am the way." You are not on the right way unless Christ is first and last with you. His precious blood to put away your sin, his glorious resurrection to be your justification, his ascension to heaven to take possession of a place for you, his second coming to receive you to himself—all these are the way. Christ is all in all to the man who is on the right road. Note this!

Sometimes it is called the way of faith. That is the only way to heaven. The way of works might have taken us to heaven if we had not fallen in Adam, and had never sinned on our own account; but having been once defiled by iniquity, we cannot be saved by future innocence. Do what we may, we cannot mend the life which we have marred; the flaws and fractures will appear. Justice will demand punishment for past transgressions: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." We must be saved by grace through faith, as it is written, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The way of faith is the way to glory.

This way is also called the way of truth. If your religion is based on a lie, it must deceive and ruin you. If it is founded on the truth of God, it will truly save you, but not else. Alas, for many! The way of truth they have not known. Many hate truth, and go about with a thousand inventions to get rid of it. If you love truth, and follow it, and believe in it as God has revealed it in the person of his Son, all is well with your soul.

It is also called the way of holiness. My dear hearer, are you in that way? This is the King's highway, and it leads to the city of the

great King. Do you hate sin? Do you follow after righteousness? Would you scorn a lie? Do you keep your word even when it is to your personal loss? Do you endeavour to act fairly to your workmen, kindly to your servants, faithfully to your masters, uprightly to all? When you feel that you have erred, are you humbled and grieved? Do you endeavour for the future to guard the point in which experience has proved you to be weak? Do you watch against temptation, and daily cry to God for strength to overcome it? Depend upon it, he that would be happy hereafter must be holy now.

The road to glory is also called the "way of peace." We must seek after peace of conscience, peace with God, peace with our fellow-men. If our end is to be peace, our way must be peace: a quiet, contented mind is a thing to cultivate. Keep in this way!

Let me tell you two or three more things which the Bible says about this way. It is the "old" way. It bids us ask for the old paths. True religion is no new thing. Your mother was saved: you could not doubt it. Be saved in the way which led your mother safely. If there might be a new way, I would not try it: one cannot afford to play experiments with the only soul he has. That which has saved those who have gone before is quite good enough for me. I love to think of friends in glory: their footprints cheer me. I love

> "The way the holy prophets went,
> The road that leads from banishment."

The moderns have struck out a new path altogether; their road is both new and broad. What! Were the saints of former ages all mistaken? The martyrs—did they die for a falsehood, and shed their blood for doctrines which criticism explodes? The men of whom the world was not worthy, were they all the dupes of theories which time has disproved? Did nobody know anything till Darwin appeared? Were those who believed that "The things which are seen were not made of things which do appear," downright fools? Is it quite so certain as some think it, that the things which were made grew out of things already existing? Of course, I know that nowadays men are so wonderfully intelligent, that they have discovered that human life has been "evolved" from lower life. We are the heirs of oysters, and the near descendants of apes. It has taken some time to compass the evolution; and yet I will grant that very hard shells are still to be met with, and some men are not much above animals—especially such men as can be duped by this hypothesis. Were the old-fashioned believers all wrong? No, my brethren, they were not wrong: their lives and their deaths prove that they were right. We shall be wrong if we leave the old and tried paths for these new cuts which lead into fathomless bogs of unbelief. It was enough to condemn the idols of Israel that they were new gods, newly set up; and it is enough to condemn the gospels of the hour that they are such as were never heard of in the golden ages of the church. "The old is better." Yet it is strange, but true, that the way to heaven is in Scripture called the "new" way; the "new and living way"—that is to say, Christ's blood: for when Christ came, men began to understand the way of salvation more clearly, and it came to them with a

freshness of power which the old ceremonial law knew nothing of. The incarnate Saviour, by his death, has opened a new and living way to the secret pavilion of God. We want nothing newer than the opened way which is made by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. That gospel which came in with a dying and risen Saviour is the gospel for us.

Again, we are told in the Bible that it is a "narrow" way. We are expressly told that "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." "Oh," says one, "I like a man who is broad in his views." Do you? Possibly you are in the broad road yourself; and if so, "a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind." How can you, in the teeth of Holy Scripture, admire the broad way? for it surely leads to destruction. "I cannot endure narrow views," cries one. Cannot you? Then what are you going to do? Do you refuse to follow the narrow way? Yet that way leads to life; and though "few there be that find it," I should have thought it well worth your while to be one of the few. Of course, great thinkers and great doubters shun it, because it does not afford room enough for their greatness; but common-place men should choose it, because it leads to the right place. It is curious, is it not? that our Lord Jesus Christ should describe this heavenly way as narrow, and yet some who call themselves Christians would, if they could, make it out to be very broad. Everything broad commends itself to their taste. Well, well, however unpopular may be my teaching, I exhort the young men here to follow the narrow way, to keep close to Christ and the crimson way of his precious blood, and to defy all ridicule on that account. Follow after holiness, and let the gaieties and vanities of the world go to those who love them. Keep you to the narrow way of secret prayer and hallowed fellowship with God; and let those who want sing-song and theatricals go their own way. It may be, you will appear to be losers by quitting the fellowship of the worldly religious; but your loss will be unspeakable gain to you in the long run. Dare to be Puritanic, conscientious, scrupulous. Venture to follow Christ, even if you go alone; for so shall you go aright.

But I will not keep you much longer. I am still speaking upon this third precept: you are to *put your heart into your religion.* In no business can a man prosper if he is half-hearted. Religion without heart is a wretched affair. That man who professes to fear the Lord, and yet only puts half his heart into his godliness, will make a great failure of it. He is a poor, miserable creature who has enough religion to prevent his enjoying sin, and not enough to make him enjoy holiness. He that goes right into the heart of godliness will be made happy by it; but no one else. I am speaking to young men, and I would drive home this truth in their case. They will recollect that, when they were boys, they went down to the river for a bathe, and certain of the lads went paddling in just above their ankles, or their knees. How they shivered with the cold! They did not much appreciate the bath. But one of the boys mounted the spring-board, and leaped right into the water head-first. I see him now, coming up all glowing and rosy; and I hear his cheery voice, shouting, "Splendid!"

Just so. If you go in for it, you will find true religion to be splendid; but if you go paddling about in the shallows of it, you will become chilled with doubts, and fears, and the comfort of it will be far from you. If religion is important, it is all-important. If it is anything, it is everything. If false, leave it altogether: if true, love it altogether. To show how the joy of religion is proportioned to the degree of it, I sometimes tell a story. It is a parable most instructive, and fully to the point, and therefore I cannot help repeating it. It is a story of a man in America who was fond of growing the choicest apples. He asked a neighbour to come up to his orchard and taste his apples, which he greatly praised as the best in the world. This high praise he sang many times in his friend's ear; but he could not get him to come to his place to taste the fruit. He asked him again and again, and still the friend did not come. He therefore hinted that there must be a reason for his refusal. "Well," said the other, "the truth is, that one day, as I was driving by your orchard, I saw an apple or two that had dropped into the road, and I picked one up and tasted it, and it was out of sight the sourest thing in all creation. I am very much obliged to you, but I have had enough for one lifetime." "Oh," said the owner, "do you know I went forty miles to buy those sour apples, and I planted them all along the hedge; for I thought they would be good for the boys, and keep them from picking and stealing. They are a fine sort for that particular purpose. But if you will come and see me, I will lead you inside the orchard, past those first two or three rows, and you will find a sweetness and a flavour which will fill your mouth with delight." "I see," said the other, "I see." Do you also see my drift? All round the outside of religion there are sour fruits of prohibitions, rebukes, repentances, and self-denials, to keep the hypocrites out. Have you never seen how long they pull their faces, as if their religion did not agree with them? and that is because they have eaten the sour apples on the outskirts. But, oh! if you would come near to the faith and joy which are in Christ Jesus, if you would give all your heart to heavenly pursuits, you would find it quite another thing. Then would your heart "rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

The text says, "Guide your heart in the way"; that is, get your very soul into the way of salvation. Get every portion of your being under holy influence. Let every fragment of your heart and mind and soul and strength be consecrated. Your heart grows like a luxuriant plant, and you must train every tendril, every shoot, in the right direction. Nail every branch to the wall, and keep it there. Try to guide your heart into the way of truth, life, and holiness; let none of it stray. Then will you be filled with delight. Then will you in very deed know that you are saved.

The last word I have to say is, oh, that everyone here present who is not saved, would attend to these three precepts *now!* Hear *now!* Make up your mind that if there be salvation to be had, you will have it. Be wise at once, lest you be wise too late. Say, "It would be folly to delay; for I may soon be dead and buried. I will have Christ to-day, my mother's Christ, my father's God." Be wise, and cry to God to help you; cry for the Holy Spirit to enable you to lay hold on

eternal life, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for immediate salvation. Trust him. Remember what I told you of Luther the other night, when he said, "I shall not save myself. Christ is a Saviour; it is his business to save." Put your soul into your Redeemer's hand. He is a Saviour, and he will save all who trust him. To trust Jesus is wise. It is wisest of all to do it at once, and here. How constantly do I hear of friends falling dead suddenly, or being taken away by unobserved disease! If I were to point to-night to the pews that have been emptied in this place since the first of January, you would be greatly surprised. Your sitting was lately occupied by one who is now dead, and this makes the spot a solemn one. Someone else will soon sit in your pew. Be wise; be wise, and seek the Lord at once. Midsummer has come upon us. Let it not pass away without your soul being brought to Jesus. The hay-time is upon us, and death is sharpening his weapon. I can hear the rink-a-tink of that dread scythe at this very moment; and you, too, will soon be withered like the grass which has fallen before the mower. Wherefore now, even now, seek ye my Saviour. I implore you, seek him without further delay! I wish that I were able to speak to you with a clear and powerful voice, which would keep pace with my heart; but as I cannot do so, I do my best, and use what voice I have. I would do anything to draw you to the Lord Jesus, who is the way of life. We shall soon stand at God's great judgment seat, and I shall have to answer for my preaching. Therefore I entreat you to be wise. Why should I give in my account with grief? "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." May the Lord lead you to do so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Proverbs xxiii. 9—35

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THE INIQUITY OF OUR HOLY THINGS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 6TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord."—Exodus xxviii. 36—38.

DEAR friends, I must begin by reminding you that we are not in this place dealing with unconverted men in their sins, but with God's people Israel in their holy things. I say this because we must never forget that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin"; and when we are dealing with certain types, it must be understood that the blood has done its essential work. Even a high priest, with all his "glory and beauty," could not put away sin as before God without reference to the shedding of blood. The atonement is supposed to have been offered: these people have been purified and brought near by the appointed offerings.

But now, here comes in the point with which this type concerns itself. They are God's people, and therefore they come to him with their gifts and thankofferings: these alone can draw near to him, or will care to do so. But how shall they draw near, for even after being reconciled by the blood they continue still to sin; there is iniquity even in their holy things. How shall they come to God without someone to stand between, who shall continually bear for them the iniquity of the "holy things which they shall hallow in all their holy gifts"? There is need of one who is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." That sacred person is provided by God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and thus the way to present acceptable sacrifice has been made clear for all the blood-washed people of God. Aaron in his glorious attire was the type of the living Christ who presented unto God the sacrifices of his people. Their faults in worship and fellowship he is made to bear, and so their gifts and prayers are accepted before a holy God. Remember that about this we are now speaking; not about the way of bringing the guilty sinner at first near to God, for that is by the

blood alone: but the way of rendering the pardoned one continually acceptable to God in his daily service of thanksgiving, and prayer, and praise, and labour, and consecrated substance, which he gladly brings to the Most High.

Aaron for this purpose was set apart beyond all other priests. They wore their plain white raiment of hallowed service, but he wore garments "for glory and for beauty." As I said, in the reading of the chapter, how glorious, how beautiful is the Lord Jesus in the eyes of God! Let me now add, how beautiful is he in our eyes! The unveiled sight of him will be our heaven. Our present view of him is our salvation, comfort, strength, and sanctification. Oh, the glory of Christ! Often have I cried to God in prayer, "I beseech thee, look not on me, my God; but look upon the face of thine Anointed! Didst ever thou see the like of him? Is he not altogether lovely to thee? Even the poor, half-opened eyes of thy servants have seen enough beauty in the Lord Jesus to ravish their hearts, and hold every affection in glad captivity. Look thou, O God, upon him, for in him thou art ever well pleased.

> 'Him and then the sinner see:
> Look through Jesus' wounds on me.'"

Why was the high priest so adorned for glory and beauty? We need such a high priest; but stop! Paul does not so put it. He says, "Such an high priest *became us*" (Heb. vii. 26). It was becoming for us to have this glorious high priest thus splendidly arrayed. When I thought over that saying of the apostle, it seemed to me that if the high priest had been covered with ashes, if he had been dressed in rags, he might have seemed such a high priest as would befit us. But God thinketh not so: he hath said, "Take away the filthy garments from him. Let them set a fair mitre upon his head." He hath covered us with a robe of righteousness, and we are comely with his comeliness which he hath put upon us; and we are such in God's sight that it is becoming that we should not be represented by a high priest in sordid garments, but by one who is dressed in "gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen." What great things God thinks of his elect! What a high price he puts upon his redeemed! His delight is in his saints. He takes more solace in them that fear him than in all creation besides. "Unto you that believe Christ is precious"; but you that believe are also precious to him. Does he not say, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable"? Therefore, none but an honourable and glorious person shall represent the chosen. Let us humbly rejoice in the glory and beauty of him who takes our place before the infinite Jehovah.

> "Jesus, in thee our eyes behold
> A thousand glories more
> Than the rich gems, and polish'd gold,
> The sons of Aaron wore."

I thank God that, though meanest and vilest of all his creatures because of my sin, yet he who represents me to God is neither mean in person nor vile in apparel, but he is altogether perfect in himself,

and altogether beauteous in his array. Take comfort from this thought to begin with. You will need such consolation, for I am going to remind you of very uncomfortable truths.

Let us consider first *a sad subject*—"The iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts"; and then, secondly, we shall dwell upon *a glad subject*—"HOLINESS TO THE LORD shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things. It shall always be upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord." May God, the Holy Ghost, open up the type before us, and also open our hearts to receive its teaching!

I. First, consider A SAD SUBJECT—"The iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel shall hallow."

They were "holy things." Despite the iniquity, their offerings were hallowed and holy. This is a precious saving clause. Our prayers, our praises, our service of God, these are holy things, albeit that iniquity attaches to them. They are holy as to God's ordinance, for he has ordained them for his glory. He has bidden us serve him. He has bidden us draw near in prayer. He has also said: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." When we do what God bids us, the act is holy, because done in obedience to the divine ordinance.

Such deeds are holy as to the divine design: for the sacrifices which the Israelites brought were meant to set forth Christ and his glorious work, and therefore they were holy. They were meant to be tokens of our gratitude, love, dedication, and homage, and therefore they are holy. The great Father teaches us much precious truth by every institution of the tabernacle, and the temple, and the gospel church, and therefore obedience to each ordinance is holy.

These deeds were often holy in the intent of the worshipper. When he brought his turtle doves, or his lamb, or his bullock, he intended, if he was not altogether outside of spiritual worship, to exercise real reverence, true allegiance, and sincere gratitude to God, and this intent was holy. Our God is so gracious as to call his people's love, his people's faith, his people's labour, his people's patience, "holy things," because he sees how truly their hearts desire that they should be so. He knows what is holy, and what is not holy; and though there be a defilement about our holy things, yet holy things they are, if sincerely presented, for the Lord God calls them so. Blessed be his name!

But although "holy things," *there was iniquity upon all of them;* and I shall not confine myself to the case of the Israelites, but shall speak of our own case. Did we ever do anything yet that had not some spot of iniquity upon it? Is not our repentance, after all, but poor stuff compared with what it ought to be? Is not unbelief mixed with our faith? Hath not our love a measure of lukewarmness in it? Did you ever sing unto the Lord yet with pure, reverent praise, and without there being some forgetfulness of the God to whom you sang? I have never prayed a prayer yet with which I have felt content. From my first prayer till now I have need of grace to cover my shortcomings at the mercy-seat. No act of consecration, no act of self-sacrifice, no rapture of fellowship, no height of spirituality has been without its

imperfection. If even the apostles on the mount of transfiguration feared as they entered into the cloud, and wandered in their speech, not knowing what they said, it is no strange thing that we are like them. If we ourselves see much to regret, what must the eye of God behold? Sadly do I say, in the language of the hymn—

> "If I sing, or hear, or pray,
> Sin is mixed with all I do."

Furthermore, *some of these sins are apparent:* indeed, many of them are painfully before our own eyes. Brethren, I need not enlarge upon our omissions: how we omit to pray; how we forget to study the Word with intelligent care; how we are remiss in keeping up daily fellowship with God; how slow we are in serving; how impatient in suffering; how backward in almsgiving; how apt to compromise with the world! If the Lord should mark iniquity, who among us could stand? When you think of what you have not done, who among you can talk about perfection? It is not so much sins of commission that trouble some of us—for by God's grace we are for the most part kept from such transgressions—but sins of omission bear terrible witness against us. Who can number them? Who can escape their accusing voice? Thou hast done well;—thou oughtest to have done much better. Thou hast done much;—thou mightest have done far more. Thou hast given freely; but hast thou ever given all that thou hast, like the poor woman with her two mites, which were all her living? O brethren, if we have any idea of what the height of the standard of holiness is we shall be far more inclined to lament our failures before God than to vaunt our holiness before men.

But the rather I will dwell upon the iniquity of those holy things which we do attend to. The phrase used in my text troubles me: I felt laid in the dust before God as I thought of it: "The iniquity of the holy things" is a terrible word to me. If the Lord sees iniquity in our holy things, what iniquities there must be in our unholy things! If even that which God calls holy still has iniquity about it, how vile must that be which even divine condescension could not call holy, which even our own conscience could not thus describe! Let us look into this sad matter. Do you never feel great dulness and deadness in holy things? One of my brethren behind me said to me one Sabbath morning, "We come here from business dull and dead; but you seem always to be full of holy life." I dropped a tear when I got away from him, to think that he should have an opinion of me which I could not pretend to deserve. Alas, beloved! we know what it is to kneel down, and feel as if we could not pray, though we had then most need to wrestle at the throne. We know what it is to read our Bible, but we might as well have read a newspaper, for all the desire of our heart to the truth of God. Have you never felt almost unwilling to worship God? I am sure some of you do, when you so readily stay away from public worship because of a little rain, or a slight headache, or some other excuse of the kind. Your willing absence is an outward and visible sign of the lack of inward and spiritual grace. When we do come to the house of God, do we always find our heart in the Lord's ways? At the hour of prayer are we

eager and earnest? Do not our spirits need whipping to devotion? Towards the business of the world we can fly like eagles, but in coming to God we creep like snails.

> "Our souls, how heavily they go
> To reach eternal joys!"

This is one of the common sins of our holy things—want of life, want of energy, want of joy in the Lord.

When you get over this, have you not full often to confess a want of reverence? We pray, my brethren, and we address God as "Holy! Holy! Holy!" but do we veil our faces with awe in his sacred presence? If we had a true sense of his holiness and glory, would not our sense of imperfection humble us in the dust? Alas! we draw near to God with our lips, but in our spirit we are flippant, impertinent, and comparatively careless. Are we ever as fully conscious of the divine Majesty as we ought to be? We sing his praises, and think rather of the music than of the worship. We use the language of prayer without an adequate sense of what we are saying. Is it not so? The Lord God is in heaven, and we are upon earth; he is perfect, and we are full of sin: how lowly should be our behaviour! Is it so? We should prize the Saviour far more as our Mediator if we had a deeper feeling of reverence for the thrice holy God to whom we approach by him. Do you not too much fail in this respect in your holy things When you come to the Lord's table to-night, may you come with that holy thoughtfulness by which you may discern the Lord's body; but you have not always done so; or if you have, you are far in advance of your pastor. It is true we pay no superstitious reverence to the material substances of bread and wine, but before him whom they symbolize we bow in lowliest worship, and with subdued spirits we eat of this bread, and drink of this cup. I fear in this holy thing we may not always have been so spiritual, so concentrated, so withdrawn from the world, or so fired with holy affection as we ought to have been.

I have to complain—and I suppose you do so also—that wandering thoughts will intrude in my prayers, my study of the Word, my sacred song, my choice meditation: indeed, even in ministering the Word among you, I find my mind roaming. I cannot wonder if you have wandering thoughts in hearing my poor words, for I cannot even hold my own mind to them as I would; yet as far as it is my Lord's Word which I proclaim, it is an unholy thing for us to be making room in our minds for other things while the truth of God is being spoken. Oh, that we could tether our thoughts to the cross, and never allow them to go further than where they can constantly have him in view! Sabbath worship, how holy and how precious it is, when the soul is at home, with her doors shut, and none within but God! but when our minds are all over the place, climbing the hills of vanity, or diving into the abysses of care, then it is ill with us. If you bring your children on your back into your pew, or if you keep on jingling the keys of your cupboards, or if all your ledgers and your day-books seem spread out before you, and all your fields and your spoiling hay are in your minds, surely such common

care will spoil your holy exercises, and prevent you from enjoying the repose of the day, and the sanctity of the holy assembly.

Too often, I am afraid, the best of God's people play the hypocrite, in a measure. Have we not in public prayer spoken beyond our experience? Have we not seemed very earnest, when, in truth, we were working ourselves up to fervency rather than speaking because our hearts were on fire? It is an awful thing to be more glib than gracious. Our own brethren soon discern the imitation of fervency. I can at the prayer-meetings readily tell when the brother is praying, and when he is only performing, or playing at prayer. You know how it is with some prayers—they are like an invoice, "as per usual," or a list of goods with "ditto, ditto" every here and there. Oh, for a living groan! One sigh from the soul has more power in it than half an hour's recitation of pretty pious words. Oh, for a sob from the soul, or a tear from the heart—a dewdrop of heaven's own life! May the Lord help us to get rid of all seeming; but this it is which to a degree defiles our sacrifices.

I have to complain also—and I fear many here would have to complain even more than I do—of want of faith in prayer. We plead with God an exceeding great and precious promise, and we think we believe it, when we do not more than half trust to it. If God wanted to surprise his people, all he would have to do would be to answer certain of their prayers; for these are offered as a matter of course, with no idea of their being heard! I think I have seen this sort of thing in many good brethren in another form. They say, "Here is a wonderful thing: I prayed for such and such a thing, and the Lord has given it me." Is that wonderful? You are on strange terms with God when it becomes a marvel to you that he keeps his promise. I like better the utterance of the good woman, who, when her friend said, "It is wonderful!" replied, "Yes, in one sense it is wonderful, but not as you mean it. It is not wonderful for God to fulfil his promises: it is just like him." It is just like the Lord to hear his people's prayers. O friends, our want of faith has done more mischief to us than all the devils in hell, and all the heretics on earth. Some cry out against the Pope, and others against agnostics; but it is our own unbelief which is our worst enemy. If we could kill Old Incredulity, we could soon rout all the rest of the devil's army. Oh for more faith, that our unbelief might not mar our holy things!

Suppose we do not fail in any of these respects, do you know what often happens? Well, after the private prayer is done, or the public worship is over, or the preaching, or the visiting of the sick has been performed, we sit down and inwardly say, "Yes, I did that uncommonly well, I know I did. I was wonderfully helped"—which, being interpreted, often means "I am a fine fellow." Then we rub our hands, and say to ourselves, "And the wonder is I am not at all proud. Thank God I am never tempted in that direction. I have too much common-sense. I know what a poor creature I am"; and so on, and so on. Thus we do our utmost to coat over our good deed with the slime of self-conceit. This is to pour filthiness upon our sacrifice, and make it an abomination in the sight of the Lord.

Beside this, there generally mingles with the pride a contempt of

others. Our endeavours to go up lead us to push others down. We have brought a bullock, and we patronizingly say, "I like to see those poor people over yonder bring their pigeons and their doves. I am glad that they do something, though it be so much less than mine." This often means, "It makes my bullock look bigger when the turtle doves and pigeons are seen by way of contrast. No doubt those good people are doing their best; but yet, I think if they tried, they might have done better. At any rate, I have far exceeded them." O foolish one! what hast thou to do with thy brother's sacrifice? What right hast thou to compare thyself with another? What hast thou that thou hast not received? and if thou hast received it, why dost thou boast thyself as though thou hadst not received it? But enough of this!

These are only a few of the iniquities of our holy things which we can see; but beside these, *there are many imperfections of our service which we do not notice*, because we are not spiritual enough to discern them; but God sees them. Bring me a needle. This is a highly polished needle. What an instance of human skill to make so small an implement so bright, so absolutely smooth! Bring me that microscope! I have just now put the wing of a butterfly under it. That is God's work, and, as I enlarge it, I discover no imperfection, but more and more of marvellous beauty. That butterfly's wing under the microscope becomes most wonderful, and I worship God as I gaze upon his handiwork. Take the butterfly away now, and put your needle in its place. What? Why this is a rough bar of iron, which has never been smoothed or polished. This is wretched workmanship. It does not seem fitted for delicate work. Such is man's manufacture, the best of it. When God puts your prayers and my sermons under his microscopic eye, they are not at all what we thought they were, but quite the reverse. This ought to humble us as we come before the presence of the All-seeing One.

These imperfections in our holy things are so grievous that they would prevent any one of our works, or offerings, or prayers being accepted before the thrice-holy God. He is so pure that he cannot endure that which is defiled; he is so perfect that he cannot enter into fellowship with that which has a blemish. We must bring that which is perfect, for it to be accepted in itself; and we have nothing of our own that is perfect; and therefore, were it not for the great high priest, of whom I am about to speak, we should be cut off from every kind of acceptance or communion with God. We have nothing which God can accept:

> Our best is all defiled with sin:
> Our all is nothing worth.

II. Secondly, we have now to consider A GLAD SUBJECT; the Lord help me to speak of it aright! The glad subject is that a high priest was provided, through whom the iniquity of Israel's holy things could be purged, and the holy things themselves could be pleasant unto God. What was done in type has also been done in reality.

Consider, then, that *God provided the high priest.* It was ordained that he should be a man perfect in his person. Any defect that could be seen of eye, or hand, or foot, disqualified him for being high priest; and secret faults, which could not be observed by his fellow-men

equally disqualified him. In our Lord Jesus there is no defect, open or secret. The verdict of Pilate was true: "I find no fault in this man." Tempted he was in all points; but sin he never did, in any point. The piercing eye of the prince of this world found nothing in him. He is perfect, and so he can be high priest unto God.

The man had to be chosen of God. Aaron was so. God elected him to that high office; and even so our Lord is God's elect, in whom his soul delighteth. The Lord saith, "I have exalted one chosen out of the people." Christ is ordained of God, and by divine authority he stands as high priest for us.

This man had to be anointed for his work. Aaron was anointed with oil; but our Lord was anointed with the Holy Spirit. We could not have a better high priest, nor could his anointing be more complete: he was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. If we had to choose, and we had the wisdom of God granted us to make the choice, we could only say, "Let *him* stand for us, for there is none like him." Blessed be God, we have precisely the high priest that we need!

This high priest was altogether given up to his people. Only a word here. He has a heart: his people's names are on the breast-plate which covers it. He has shoulders: his people's names are written on his shoulder-pieces, and thus he lends them his power. He has feet: there were no sandals for the priest, he ministered barefooted before God. Why? Because it is the only way in which the Lord can be worshipped, according to his repeated command—"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Christ has given to us the heart of his love, the shoulders of his strength, the feet of his humiliation. "He loved me, and gave himself for me." But, you observe that his head is left. Ah, well! he must give us his head. The power to think is supposed to dwell in the temples and the forehead. The golden plate covered Aaron's forehead from temple to temple, and it was always conspicuous there. Thus, Christ has given up his thought, his judgment, his mind, his every faculty, to his people. He is all ours. The high priest reserved nothing of himself: he gave all of himself to all his people. Christ is ours. From head to foot, he serves us personally and constantly.

The point I want, however, to bring out most prominently, is this—*the high priest bore "the iniquity of the holy things."* You and I have been guilty of iniquity in our holy things: we have said enough upon that humbling subject; but here is our joy, that Jesus bears it all. Putting on his heavenly mitre, marked as "HOLINESS TO JEHOVAH," he bears for us the iniquity. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin." It is a wonderful mystery, the transference of sin and of merit: it staggers human reason; faith alone apprehends it. How can the guilty be accounted righteous? How can the perfectly righteous One be made sin? Mysterious these things are; but they are true, and the Word of God is full of declarations to this effect. In this truth lies the one hope of sinners. All the iniquity of our holy things our Lord Jesus has borne, and it is no longer imputed unto us.

As he stood before God, though he bore the iniquity of the people,

yet *he exhibited to God no iniquity, but on his forehead was written,* "HOLINESS TO JEHOVAH."

Notice that he bore before God a holiness most precious; in token whereof, in type, the engraving was inscribed upon a plate of pure gold. The righteousness of Christ is more precious to God than all the mines of gold in the whole world. His righteousness was absolutely perfect, hence there was nothing on that plate of gold but "HOLINESS TO JEHOVAH." There was no iniquity in *his* holy things; his holiness was conspicuous and undeniable, it shone on the forefront of his mitre. That holiness of his was permanent. It was not painted on that sheet of gold, it was graven like the engraving of a signet. Christ's righteousness will neither wash out, nor wear out. Engraved in incorruptible gold, his righteousness shines gloriously, and never loses its virtue: it retains its permanent perfectness before the Lord. And as it was precious, perfect, permanent, so it was peculiar; for it was not merely holiness, but "HOLINESS TO JEHOVAH." Christ was wholly dedicated to Jehovah. It was his meat and his drink to do the will of him that sent him. His one thought was to glorify the Father. And that holiness of his was prominent: although it was in his secret heart, it was also on his brow, where even his enemies were forced to see it and honour it. In everything he thought, said, did, or suffered, he was evermore "*Holiness to Jehovah.*"

One thing more I want you to notice, and that is, that *he always wore it*—"And it shall always be upon his forehead." He is always "Holiness to God" on our behalf. Our Lord Jesus Christ never shifted his character, never ceased to be a servant of the Most High, and never ceased to be perfectly obedient to him whom he came to serve. Dwell upon these things. If that plate were once taken off the high priest he could not officiate, and if Christ were once to lay aside his righteousness on your behalf you could not be accepted. *Your* holiness is not always on your brow, but his holiness is always on the forefront of his mitre, and therefore you are always accepted in the beloved. How I delight to speak of this truth! There is a flood of infidelity in the church of God to-day, and it often rushes against the doctrine of imputation; in fact imputed righteousness has been kicked down the aisles of most of our places of worship: it cannot be endured. Yet we believe in it all the more for this. Listen to my text, "It shall always be upon *his* forehead, that *they* may be accepted before the Lord." *We* are accepted because of something in *him*. It is not what is upon our forehead, but what is upon his forehead that makes us and our offerings to be accepted. We are accepted in the beloved, justified by his righteousness.

I cannot preach about this matter as I would, but I beg you to think it over. The Lord Jesus by his holiness secures our personal acceptance, and then the acceptance of our holy things. Our prayers are accepted, our tears are accepted, our zeal is accepted, and our patience is accepted; to God there is now sweet music in our praises. In very deed God accepts our sermons, our Sunday-school teaching, our tract distribution, our almsgivings to the poor, our contributions to his cause.

Our holy work is now viewed with divine favour. Will you not

offer more and more of these holy things, since they are in very deed accepted in Christ? Through his glorious righteousness we are favourably regarded of the Lord: there is no question about it. First God accepts us, and then he accepts our holy things. The Lord is pleased with all we do for him, because he is pleased with his Son. When he sees our iniquity, he turns his eye away, and looks on that perfect holiness which shines upon the forehead of the Well-Beloved. Our Lord is that altar which sanctifieth both the giver and the gift. God grant us to know the comfort of this truth!

Now I have taught you the main doctrine of the type, I desire to bring forth one or two lessons.

The first is, see here *a lesson of humility*. We always want to be growing in this grace. Brethren, take us all round, we are by nature as proud as Lucifer; and if we do not happen to be flaming with pride just now, there is enough of tinder in the tinder-box of our heart to get up a blaze of pride within five minutes. We do not need the devil, nor our friends, to flatter us: we can do that business better than any of them. We have a very fine opinion of ourselves. But what have we to flatter ourselves about? Nothing. Bring out here this morning all your holy things, and enlarge upon their excellence. Bring out your diaries from the time of your conversion until now, and read the record of your good deeds. There is iniquity in them all. I have heard of a good man, who lay dying, who thought he would examine his life, and sort out his actions, laying his good deeds on his right hand, and his sins on his left hand. He went on with the sorting for a little time; but very soon he perceived that they were so much of a muchness, the good and the bad, that he felt sick of them all, and determined to bind them all up in one bundle, and throw them overboard, and trust to enter heaven by free grace alone. This was a very sensible decision. O friends, our good works, if we lay them up in store, and value them as jewels, will, like the manna in the wilderness, very soon breed worms and stink. There is enough rottenness in our best performances to make them offensive to an enlightened conscience. Oh, that this fact, that even our holy things are tainted, may be the death-warrant of our pride!

In the next place, *learn the awful hazard of going unto God without our high priest*. Our forehead will be leprous if we dare offer sacrifice without the high priest who wears the golden plate of holiness to the Lord upon his forehead. I am not going to expound the passage; but I will simply read to you, in 2 Chron. xxvi. 15—20. Uzziah was a commendable king; and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord: "His name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men: and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out

of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him." Whenever you get to think that you can stand before God, and present your own offering without the Lord Jesus, the leprosy of fatal pride is white upon your forehead. I tremble for some people when I hear them parading their own perfectness. One said, "My will is so in accord with God, that I do not need to pray." The leprosy was on his forehead when he thus spake. This has polluted many who seemed to be among the most excellent servants of God. They have tried to do without the great high priest and his representative holiness, and, like Uzziah, they have been cut off from the house of the Lord, and made to dwell alone and bemoan their folly.

But, dear friends, we may here find another lesson—*learn how you must be dressed as a royal priesthood unto the Lord.* I thought I would copy out what George Herbert says about the dress of the Lord's Aarons. You will not understand it all as I read it; but if you have George Herbert's Poems, read the piece entitled "Aaron," and chew at it till you have masticated its meaning. *He* speaks of the clergy, but we will understand him as speaking of all believers, who are as assuredly priests and clergy as any ordained ministers can be. We are made kings and priests unto our God. We want to know how we ought to be dressed. One cries, "Wear a surplice"; another says, "No, keep to the black gown." We are not thinking of such trivialities as garments, black or white. We belong to a spiritual kingdom, and our robes are spiritual. "Then," says one, "it is clear that we must be holy." Granted; but this is not our beauty and our glorious dress before the Lord. If you put on your own holiness, to be dressed in it, you will only display your iniquity. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." The Lord Jesus himself is our dress: we put on Christ. Let Herbert speak:—

"Holiness on the head,
Light and perfections on the breast,
Harmonious bells below, raising the dead,
To lead them unto life and rest;
Thus are true Aarons drest.

"Profaneness in my head,
Defects and darkness in my breast,
A noise of passions ringing me for dead
Unto a place where is no rest;
Poor priest, thus am I drest.

"Only another head
I have, another heart and breast,
Another music, making live, not dead,
Without whom I could have no rest:
In him I am well drest.

"Christ is my only head,
My alone only heart and breast,
My only music, striking me even dead;
That to the old man I may rest
And be in him new drest.

"So holy in my head,
Perfect and light in my dear breast,
My doctrine tuned by Christ (who is not dead,
But lives in me while I do rest);
Come, people: Aaron's drest."

When you have Christ's head, and breast, and doctrine, then you are ready for service, and may say, "Come, people: Aaron's drest." This is how I desire to preach to you, putting off self, and putting on Christ as all. C. H. S.: away with him! I. H. S.: let that dear name be glorified for ever. When you go to Sunday-school, do not go as pious Mary or thoughtful Thomas; you will make a mess of it if you do; but go as the messenger of the Lord, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: he is Lord of all. Be clothed with the Lord Jesus. Hide yourself away in his glory and beauty, and then you will be a true Aaron, dressed for your holy work.

Lastly, *let sinners gain a store of comfort here.* If God's own people have iniquity in their holy things, and yet they have Christ to bear it for them, how patient must he be who is our high priest! You, poor sinner, you want a Saviour very much; but, lo! he is here, ready to be a go-between for you, and put his righteousness in front of your iniquity, and himself in the stead of your poor guilty and condemned person. Come, now, and hide away in Christ. Come, now, and trust my Lord with all his beauteous garments on. He wears them still, and wears them for poor ragged sinners. Come, and look up to Jesus, and he will stand for you, and you shall become the righteousness of God in him, because he is made a curse for you. God bless you, beloved, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus xxviii. 1—38.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—912, 382, 325.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PASTOR'S JOY AND CONFIDENCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 13TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace."—Philippians i. 3—7.

THE Epistle to the Philippians is the epistle of joy. Bengel sums it up in two Latin words, which, being interpreted, signify, "I rejoice, rejoice ye." Here we come to that sweet fruit of the Spirit which we call "Joy."

The statement Paul makes about the Philippian church shows to what a high estate a church can come. Beloved, we of the Tabernacle never wish to be like the church in Galatia, which was bewitched by false teachers, who led away the people from the vital doctrine of justification by faith. Paul had to be very sharp with them, and to lay down the grand fundamentals of free grace, so as to bring them back to the one sure rock on which they ought to have been builded. Into that condition, by the grace of God, we have never fallen. At the same time, I am afraid we have never reached as far as the Philippians went; and this morning it is my intense desire that, while I show you what they attained, every member of this church may resolve, in the Holy Ghost, that he will labour to bring us to that happy condition. May God the Holy Spirit fire us with a devout ambition not to be a whit behind the best of the apostolic churches! The possibilities of a great church like this are immeasurable. We may not sit down and dream of what *we* can do; but we may feel our heart pulsing with a strong desire, that whatever God can do with us, and by us, may be carried out to the full. If in anything there has been a falling short, may each member be determined that the responsibility shall not lie at his door!

I invite you to think, first, that the apostle speaks of the church of Philippi as of *a people whom he always remembered with joy;* secondly, as of *a people whom he regarded with confidence:* for he says of them, "Being

confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"; and, thirdly, we perceive that he viewed them as *a people concerning whom he gave all the glory to God alone.* This fact is very conspicuous throughout the whole passage.

I. First, in the church at Philippi we see A PEOPLE WHOM THE APOSTLE REMEMBERED WITH JOY.

This is seen in his declaration that *all his memory of them was happy:* "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." A better rendering is, "I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you." Taking the long run of his acquaintance with them, remembering them from the time when he preached by the river-side, and Lydia was converted, even until the moment of his writing to them as a prisoner in Rome, he knew nothing of them but that which gave him joy. He bethought him how they had of their own free will ministered again and again to his necessities, when no other church was mindful of him. He says, "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only." Their grateful benevolence caused him to thank God. He had no dash of bitter in the cup of his happy memory of them. All along, as he remembered their prayers, their courage, their faith, their labour, their unity, their constancy, their zeal, their thoughtfulness, and their liberality, he felt unmingled gratitude to the Author of all these excellent things. I trust there are many ministers who, with perhaps some slight reserve, can say of their people, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." If any man can say this, I claim to be that man. All have not been faithful to God in the long years of my ministry; but, taking you as a whole, you have been true to the core. This was a great wonder at Philippi; for wanderings from sound doctrine, or noticeable departures from the way of rectitude, or acts of unkindness to their spiritual leader, would have destroyed this happy memory of Paul. A consistent life may be marred in any one Christian; and when there are many united in fellowship, what a risk there is to the whole church from the power for mischief which lies in any one person! One cantankerous, over-bearing, changeable mind, or one hypocritical professor, may blot the record of a church of God. Truly, "one sinner destroyeth much good." It had not been so at Philippi.

Again, *all the apostle's remembrance of them was tender.* I am sure it was so; because he does not say, "I thank God," but, "I thank *my* God upon every remembrance of you." When his faith was lively, and his joy in God was overflowing, when in his closest approaches to the throne, in his most hallowed familiarities with his great Lord, he could say, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." There existed between Paul and the Philippians a loving tenderness. They had been most kind to him personally, and most hearty in their co-operation with him in his labour of love, so that when he was thanking his own God for his choicest mercies, his mind brought before him these dear people. Brethren, in the relation of pastor and people I notice in many places an absence of anything like tender

affection; and when that is gone the very joy of the gospel is gone from the preacher, and to a very large extent from the people. They invite him to take office, they pay him a wage more or less scanty, and then they send him about his business because they are tired of him. Can they expect a blessing upon such a hireling ministry, from which every element of holy relationship is absent? But in the case in which the pastor is the spiritual father of his church, and a true shepherd of souls, how different is the relationship! When they were sad, he has cheered them; when they were in difficulties, he has guided them; when their hands hung down, he has strengthened them; and because of all this there exist a near fellowship and a tender love, as of children to a father, or of brother to brother; so that he rejoices in them, and they rejoice in him. May it be so among us evermore! If it is not so among *us*, where is it so?

Again, *all Paul's memory of Philippi excited gratitude in his mind.* He could not have said of the Galatians, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." Oh, no! He said, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" There were persons of whom he said, "I thank God that I baptized none of you." He was pleased that believers should be baptized; but he was glad that he had not baptized certain persons who would have made capital out of it, and boasted that they were baptized by the hands of Paul. All good people are not equally good. There are some in the world whom we hope to meet in heaven, with whom fellowship is difficult. If they were on the other side of the Atlantic we might love them better than when we see much of them. I know several Christian people with whom I would sooner sit in heaven throughout all eternity than sit ten minutes with them on a sofa here below; distance, in their case, might lend enchantment to the view. It was not so with the Philippians—Paul thought of them with devout gratitude to his God that there were such people, and that he had come into personal contact with them. He knew the ins and outs of them, and yet he could thank his God whenever he thought of them. Dear friends, may it be so with us, that men of God may thank God for the existence and the work of this church!

It is well with a man when he so rejoices in the excellence of others that he thanks God about it, and prays about it. It is well with men when there is a something in their lives for which holy men can devoutly thank God. I have seen a good deal of testimonial-giving, and of public laudation of prominent men; but the happiest condition of things would have arrived if in our heart of hearts we delighted in the holiness of other Christian men, and made a point of praising God on that account. To see another to be more gracious than oneself, and then to praise God for it; is this common? We pray for those that err: do we praise for those who stand firm? It is a beautiful spirit to cultivate. May the Holy Spirit increase it in us all!

Again, *all his prayers for them were joyful.* He says, "Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy." For some we have had to pray with tears and sighs, and for others with trembling; but the Lord so heard Paul in the past with regard to these Philippians, that every time he began to pray he felt liberty in prayer, a joy in bearing their names before the Lord, and a sweet assurance

that he was not praying in vain. His was not the cry of anguish, but the request of delight. When we pray for those who are our joy, and for that which will be their joy, we may well mingle joy with earnestness. For these beloved ones Paul approached the mercy-seat with boldness and confidence: he felt sure of being heard on their account. In very truth, I can say the same of you all in this place. Never can I pray with greater peace of soul than when I plead for you. I believe, on the other hand, thousands of godly people find a joy in making request for me. So am I constantly told, and I have no doubt upon the matter.

Now, why was all this joy in the apostle's mind with regard to the saints in Philippi? This is the point I desire to press upon you. Paul rejoiced because *all along they had been in hearty fellowship with him in the best things*. Observe: "For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." There are churches wherein the minister is nominally the leading officer; but he cannot lead, for the church does not follow. See that young officer, sword in hand, leap the rampart. He looks back; but, alas! his troop is yards behind him. He cries, "Come on! Come on!" But there is no answer; he might as well call to stones. This is poor work. But see another; wherever he advances, his soldiers are at his side; they are as eager as he is, the victory is as much for them as for him, and they feel it is so. Well may there be an outcry against "the one-man ministry" when the one man is not backed up by all who are in church-fellowship; but, brethren, it need not be so; indeed it is not so among us. True and hearty have been the efforts of many in this church. Paul seemed to stand alone when he was with the Galatians; but the Philippians were at his side and all around him, bearing him on from victory to victory by their unanimous fellowship. For this he thanks God; and well he might.

They were in fellowship with him concerning his one sole object—"For your fellowship in the gospel." If you look at the Revised Version it is "for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel." The apostle longed to spread the gospel; so did they. He was earnest to carry it to the regions beyond; so were they. If he preached, they would be there to encourage him. If he held special meetings, they were ready to help. If money was required, every man was ready according to his means, without pressing. Each one felt as earnest about the work as did his minister. They were enthusiastic for the furtherance of the gospel: they were heartily with him where he most valued their sympathy.

This fellowship began early: "from the first day" of their conversion. I think we could prophesy what converts will be from what they are at first. Some begin warmly, and gradually cool down; but we seldom know them to develop much heat of zeal if they begin in lukewarmness. When we join a church, it is well that from the first day we enquire of the Lord, "What wouldst thou have me to do?" The kind of recruits which we desire in Christ's army are those who are in fellowship with us for the furtherance of the gospel from the very first. I like to see the convert at the prayer-meeting, the cottage-meeting, or the Bible-class, or the Ragged-school, or the

Sunday-school, or the Tract Society, doing what he can to help others. He that begins early begins hopefully. Concerning some older Christians, we could not speak of their fellowship in the gospel from the first day, for they were slow in coming forward; but I hope they will do all the more *now*, to make up for it. I have heard of an advertisement of a burial club which began thus, "Seeing that many persons find it extremely difficult to bury themselves"——. That is not my experience; for I should have to say, "Seeing that many church-members find it exceedingly easy to bury themselves." We receive them into our number with pleasure, but we hear no more of them. We have the distinguished privilege of enrolling their names in our book, and that is all. We give them our right-hand of fellowship, but they do not give us their right-hand of labour. Where are they? Where? Echo answers, *Where?* The Philippians had fellowship in furthering the gospel from the first day.

Then mark, that they were men of good wind, who could keep up the running; they were as patient and persevering as they were zealous at the first. "From the first day until now." *Until now.* Some run well for a time, but that time is short. Oh, for the men who will live as long as they live; and not die while they are alive! How many who should have been our helpers are lost to us! They have grown indifferent, or they have become advanced in years, and fancy that they can now do nothing because they cannot do all they once did. We can always do something for Jesus if we are willing. As we are not too old to receive grace, let us not think ourselves too old to use it; for it is given to be used. The aged are capable of the noblest work which can be performed. Encouragement of the sad and feeble almost necessitates an experience which only age can bring. There is as truly a service in the church for the most venerable as for the most active. Let no man cut himself off from the privilege of serving the Lord Jesus "from the first day until now."

And what they did appears to have been so general as to be practically unanimous. He speaks of them all as in full fellowship with him in his life-work. When shall we get churches alive all through? When false doctrine taints a church it usually sours the whole of it, for "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"; but if they are good churches, I am sorry to say the perfume of consecration does not sweeten every part. In most churches there are a few who, to a large extent, do everything and give everything; then another portion assist occasionally, so far as they are urged on by the consecrated ones; and after these, you find a large number who are practically the baggage of the church, the lumber which has to be carried by the efficient members. Alas, that we have so many in ambulances, when every hand is wanted in the fight! A church is in a poor condition when it is largely so; but it is in fine health when all are hearty in the service of the Lord, as at Philippi.

It was practical fellowship. Some of them preached, all of them prayed; some of them contributed money, and all gave love: nobody shirked his work, which was not looked upon as a labour, but as a privilege. You will not wonder that Paul rejoiced; for it gives joy to every earnest man to see others earnest. The great cause is

as much yours as it is mine. A church which feels that holy service is not for a few, but for all the members, is a credit to divine grace. It is a lovely piece of divine mosaic work, in which jewels of costly price are set about with solid gold, and the whole exhibits a design of matchless beauty. Fellowship with the Holy Spirit and fellowship with great saints is a rare jewel; may we each one possess it!

I will not stay longer on this point; for I shall have to return to it when considering our next head.

II. Paul saw in the Philippians A PEOPLE WHOM HE REGARDED WITH THE UTMOST CONFIDENCE: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." What was Paul's confidence, then?

His confidence was *that the work in their hearts was a divine work.* The Lord himself had begun a good work in them. This is a vital matter. Everything turns upon the question, "Is this conversion a divine work or not?" The man is altered for the better; the woman is certainly improved; a work has been done; but is it God's work? or is it the work of the flesh? Ah, dear friends! a moral change may sometimes look so much like a spiritual change, that onlookers cannot detect the difference. The child of nature, finely dressed, is not the living child of divine grace; and how are we to tell the one from the other? "By their fruits ye shall know them." The apostle had found the Philippians true in their partnership in the Lord's work. They suffered for their Lord patiently, they defended the faith bravely, they spread it zealously, and their lives confirmed it; and so Paul said to himself, "This is the finger of God; the Lord himself has begun this work." How happy we are when we can have this confidence of every member of the church, that from the beginning of their religion God has been at work in their hearts! I pray you, do not be satisfied, any of you, with the most promising religiousness, if it is not God's work; if you have undergone a change, take care that it is such a change as only the Creator could have wrought in you—a resurrection from the dead, an opening of blind eyes, a turning from darkness to light. If you have not undergone a renewal which betokens heavenly handiwork, be uneasy. Be restless until God himself, who made you, makes you anew in Christ Jesus. My heart silently entreats the Lord to begin this good work in you at once; and may there be signs following which shall give us the joy of knowing that indeed and of a truth the Lord hath done it!

Paul could see, in the next place, that *it was a growing work,* for the Lord was still performing it. The work of God is always a growing work. If things do not grow they lack one of the chief marks of life. You put into the ground something which looks like a living plant, and after it has been there six months you find it just the same, without a single bud or shoot. What do you say of it? Why, you conclude that it is an artificial production, devoid of life. If we do not grow better, surely it is because we have no goodness wrought in us. If we do not grow in grace it must be because we have no grace. Paul saw God carrying on the work in the heart of the Philippians, so that they went from strength to strength; and about this he was confident.

He was also confident *that God would perfect it.* He says, "He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Shall we be absolutely perfect until then? I think not. Perfection in a modified sense is possible through divine grace, but not absolute perfection. Old Master Trapp very well says a Christian may be perfect, but not perfectly perfect. Perfection in the Scriptural use of it is not at all what those make of it who boast of perfection in the flesh. A child is perfect when it is newly born; there is every toe on the tiny foot, and its eyes, and ears, and nose, and other organs are all there; but if you tell me that a child is a perfect man, I smile at you. So the Christian may be perfect as to all his parts, "perfect and entire, wanting nothing," and yet he may not be perfect as to development by a very long way. One says, "We shall be perfect at death, shall we not?" It is not so written here; but "He will perform it *until the day of Jesus Christ.*" We may be perfect in death, doubtless, as to the moral and spiritual nature; but a man has a body as well as a soul, and it needs both parts to make the perfect man. While the worms are devouring the body the man is not yet perfect. He will be perfect as to his whole manhood when the Lord shall come, and the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. Paul delights to make the Christian leap over that little rivulet called death, and swallow up the thought of dissolution in the far grander fact of the coming of the Lord. The second advent ought to be much more on our minds than the hour of our death. The Lord will perform the sacrifice which he has begun, until he perfects it in the day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall receive his church unto himself. Then shall be the general judgment; and oh, what a blessing to be found perfect in that day of decision! He shall separate the righteous from the wicked, as the shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. When that great day is ended, then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun. Our Lord Jesus will be covered with the infinite splendour of God in that day, and then shall we be like him: his glory will be reflected upon all believers. You have no idea of what a perfect man will be like. "Thou seest not that body that shall be." God will give us such a body as it pleaseth him, and to each one a body of his own. If you had never seen wheat growing, you would never imagine that the shrivelled grain of corn would produce the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear. Take an example still more striking: many very tiny seeds produce flowers which excel in beauty of form and colour; could you have ever guessed that the insignificant seeds could have come to this? Even so, the body is sown in weakness, but it is raised in power. It is sown in corruption, but it is raised in incorruption. The star of to-day will be the sun of to-morrow. All glory lieth in the bud of our struggling humanity when once grace has quickened it. O brethren, he that hath begun a good work in us will not only give us perseverance until death, but what is even more, he will give us perfection in the day of Christ. It is altogether a more comprehensive thought than the great truth of final perseverance; it includes that blessed truth within its sweep, but it also secures eternal glory both to soul and body.

Was Paul justified in being so confident, not only that these people

were converted, but that they would be eternally saved? Leave out of the question his writing as an inspired man; how did he gain his confidence? *His confidence partly arose out of his love:* "Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart." His love to them was not the mere glow of nature, but the flame of grace. He saw so much of Christ in them that he could not help admiring and loving them; and he felt sure that they were of the sort that never draw back unto perdition, but believe to the salvation of their souls. He perceived that the grace which was in him was in them also; and therefore, as he hoped to be kept to the end, he felt that they would be so kept also. As he felt sure that the work of grace in them was of God, and of God alone, so he was confident that they would never fail. A good foundation is a grand security that the house will be substantial. Those we love in the Lord, because of what the Lord has done for them, we feel sure about as to their future.

Furthermore, *their long-continued character confirmed the apostle in his confidence;* for he adds, "Inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." When he was bound, they were not ashamed of his chain. When he was in prison the jailer washed his stripes, and refreshed him at his table; and this proved an omen of loving liberality throughout life. When Paul was taken away to Rome, the Philippians took care that he should not be left penniless, but they sent out of their poverty to his assistance. He felt confidence in a people who could do this. Shame turns many of the weaker sort aside; but the faithful despise it. Those who love holiness when others despise and ridicule it, are the people to stand fast.

Besides, they were partners with Paul in the defence of the gospel. If any Galatian teachers came their way, they gave them the cold shoulder; for they would not give up the grand old gospel to please the wise men of the period. In this way, my brethren, have you also stood by your own minister in those protests against error which have cost him so dear. Your faithfulness gives me great confidence concerning you. The people who can bear the attacks made upon you, and the baits held out to you, can be relied upon under God. You are not ashamed of my bonds, for you are heartily with me in the defence of the gospel in this day of falsehood.

They were also with the apostle as to the confirmation of the gospel. Their lives proved the truth of the Word of grace. When Paul was preaching, if he wanted to show that the gospel is the power of God, he pointed to what had been accomplished in Philippi, and none could gainsay the argument. A living argument is invincible. Reasoning is very well, but fact is overwhelming. Oh, that every Christian would so live as to prove the power of the gospel!

He adds another reason why he was so sure of them, namely, that *they were partakers of his grace.* The same grace which had saved him saved them. They ascribed their salvation to sovereign grace, even as he did. The life in them as babes in grace was the same life which dwelt in him as a father in Israel. Their gospel and his gospel were identical; and their spirit and his spirit were cast in the same mould.

His grace was such that he could not be seduced into hoping for salvation by works; nor could they. He believed in divine sovereignty, in electing love, in effectual atonement; and so did they. They were with him in all things; not in a forced union, but in hearty love to the same truth. Besides, he loved the souls of men, and was always labouring to lead men to Jesus; and they did the same. He delighted best to preach where Christ had never been made known, and not to build upon another man's foundation; and in this they supported him. They were with him in every loving endeavour to spread the gospel. Now, it is a grand thing when a minister has great confidence in his people, based upon the fact that he sees the grace of God in them bringing forth fruit unto the glory of God. Foolish fondness is to be avoided, but a confidence which is justified by evidence is a great solace to the heart.

What strength holy living in his people gives to the preacher of the Word of God! A man comes before you and says, "There is, somewhere about here, an invisible lake, containing the purest, coolest, and most refreshing water that ever you drank. You never saw water so pure and delicious." We ask the gentleman to let us see this lake. No, he cannot show the lake, but he will allow us to examine the streams which flow out of it. That is a fair test, and we agree to abide by it. Here is one of the outflows. We fill a glass from it, and hold it up to the light. Why, here are little whales and elephants swimming in it, and no end of tiny sea monsters disporting themselves: that lake is hardly the place to drink from, unless one would have meat as well as drink at every draught. Our informant assures us that there must be a mistake somewhere. So we hope. This stream has evidently gone wrong; he will take us to another outflow. Again we dip our cup, and lo! it is filled with water of a strange colour, as if the filth of some great city had run into it. We loathe to drink. Again we are told that there is some failure here also; and we are begged to try again. After three or four such experiments, we feel quite unable to believe in this crystal lake. Such streams as these have not come out of an expanse of purity; we will keep to our old-fashioned waterworks till we have more reliable information. See the parallel. If Paul had begun praising the gospel, and the people had said, "Show it to us by its effects"; he might have said, "Let us pay a visit to Lydia, the seller of purple." They find out her store, and look at her wares. Somehow her purple does not seem to be dyed after the ancient Tyrian fashion. The colour is not true or fast. If she tries to pass off a base imitation as the original article we reckon the woman an old cheat, and by no means a good evidence of the power of the gospel. If she uses a trade-mark which does not belong to her, we conclude that her religion is worthless. Let us call upon the jailer, who is another instance of the work of grace in Philippi. When we come to the jail the porter tells us that the jailer is beating the prisoners; and on enquiry we find that the prison is a little hell, and those in it are wretched in the extreme under his tyrannical hand. "He is worse," says the jailer, "since Paul came here. He talks a great deal about religion, but we do not see much of it, unless it lies in being harsh, suspicious, cruel, and

selfish." If these things happened, Paul would feel sorry that he brought us to Philippi, and he would be unable to preach the word with boldness. I will not make any application, dear friends, you can do that for yourselves.

III. My third point is this, that although Paul speaks concerning the excellence of the Philippians, he views them as A PEOPLE FOR WHOM HE GAVE ALL GLORY TO THE GRACE OF GOD. He did not praise them, but the Lord who had saved them.

Observe how he began, "I thank my God." *In what was done he sees reason for gratitude to God.* Brethren, if we win a single soul, let us humbly thank God for it. If, after years of labour, any one of you should bring but two or three children to Jesus, you will have reason to thank God to all eternity. A friend said to me on Wednesday, when the sun was shining, "We ought to be grateful for this fine weather." I replied, "I go farther than that—I *am* grateful for it." We should not only acknowledge what we ought to do, but we should do it. If God gives you any success in his service, do not say, "I ought to be thankful," but be thankful from the bottom of your heart up to the brim of it. I remember a brother who used to pray, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof *we desire to be* glad." The Bible does not say so: the Bible says, "whereof we *are* glad." Another cries, "The love of Christ ought to constrain us." The Bible does not talk in that fashion; it says, "The love of Christ constraineth us." What we ought to do we should do. A Christian's life should be the decalogue written at large, and somewhat more.

But Paul also, after he had thanked God, *kept on praying for what was still needed.* "Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request." See, dear brethren: at Philippi he has not only begun with God, but he goes on with God. He has much more to do, but he does not attempt to do it without his Lord. Oh, that all workers were of this mind! We deal with God too little. A person exclaimed, "Let us get up a revival." The revivals which men can get *up* had better be left alone: we need to get revivals *down*. If we get a revival up, it must come from beneath; but if we get a revival down, it comes from above. Lord, revive us: we pray for it, and when it comes we will praise thee for it. Brethren and sisters, we must mix up our constant service with more prayer and praise if we desire it to be largely effectual. If the work is worth anything, it is God's work in us and by us: he begins it, carries it on, and completes it. What, then, can we do, if we do not draw nigh to him? Our labour must have a constantly distinct reference to God. Sunday-school teachers, your work requires you to begin with God: do not dare to go to the class even once without fervent prayer in the Spirit. When you have given the lesson, go straightway and ask God's blessing on it. Do not omit this even once. Paul's way is to thank God and to pray to God, and it must be yours if you would have Paul's joy.

As to *his confidence about the future of his converts, it was all in God.* It was not confidence in them apart from the work of God in them. He says, God began it, and God will carry it on. He does not depend on the strength of their principles, nor the force of their resolutions,

nor the excellence of their habits; but he relies upon God, who will perform what he has begun. Did not Paul begin it? No, no; for if he had begun it he would have to carry it on; and that could not be. Did not they begin it themselves? Certainly not. Does the sinner take the first step? How can he? He is dead in sin. If he does take the first step apart from the Spirit of God, he can take all the rest without God. It is with the sinner as with the Romish Saint Denis. You have heard the old fable, that when he had his head cut off he picked it up and walked a thousand miles with it in his hand. A scoffer said that the thousand miles' walk was not at all remarkable; it was only the first step that had any difficulty in it. Just so; when a soul goes to heaven, if it takes the first step in its own strength, it can walk all the way; and then it will have all the glory. Brethren, we may truly sing,

"No sinner can be
Beforehand with thee."

God commences the good work, however faint and feeble the beginning may appear. The tiny brooklet at the river-head of repentance is of God as much as the broad river of heavenly character. This is a solemn truth. How deeply it should humble us! We cannot even begin; we cannot dig out the foundation; how can we bring forth the topstone? All is of grace from first to last. While the apostle is so practical, as I have shown him to be, yet see how soundly doctrinal he is! He never quits the grand doctrine of free, sovereign, effectual grace: "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Beloved friends, I close when I say *the apostle derives his confidence from a great principle.* The great principle is, that what God begins he will perfect. For if he did not do so, where was the wisdom of beginning? It is a word of derision when those who pass by a half-finished building say, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish." We never praise a man for wisdom who makes an attempt which he does not carry through. Could angels rejoice in a work which God began and then left to fall through? It might also suggest a want of power. If a man is wise in his beginnings, he may break down because, through unforeseen difficulty, he has not sufficient means to complete his design. You often see the carcase of a house, and it is never a happy sight: it suggests want of means. But can there be any want of power with God? Nothing is impossible with him. But there might also be lack of perseverance. Some men are always great at beginnings; but they have no stay in them: they change their minds. Does the Eternal God suffer change? Is it not said that he is "without variableness or shadow of turning"? Granted an immutable God, and we may be sure that grace will complete what grace begins. Nor can God forsake the work of his own hands from want of long-suffering. A man might begin to bless another, and that other might be so ungrateful that the benefactor grew impatient, and gave him up. Will God fail in grace? Assuredly not. "His mercy endureth for ever."

The top and bottom of it is, that our confidence in one another must

only be confidence in God, and our confidence for ourselves must rest in God, or it will be sheer delusion.

But, beloved, albeit that where God has begun a good work he will carry it on, this does not put prayer aside; for Paul prays for these very people. Neither does this lessen the necessity of a holy life; for Paul is only confident about saints who were hearty "in the defence and confirmation of the gospel," and partakers of divine grace. He felt confident of the ultimate perfection of those only who had a divine work within them, and proved it by their fellowship in the furtherance of the gospel. How can we profess that grace is in our hearts by divine implanting if we live in secret sin? How can we hope to persevere if we have not begun? If we do not join in the prayers and efforts of the church of God, how can we hope to partake in the reward at the coming of the Lord? The question as to whether God has begun saving work in us must be answered by our faith and our life; and if it be satisfactorily proved that he has begun it, we can depend upon him to finish it. If, on the contrary, we have reason to fear that he has not begun it at all, we should not deceive ourselves, but take up our true position. We may still cry to him as sinners, and look to Jesus as the Author of faith. This will be wise, and this will be successful; for Jesus says he will cast out none that come to him. "This man receiveth sinners." I hope every unconverted person here this morning, who sees that salvation is God's work, will say to himself, "I will even look out of myself to him who is able to begin the work in me. If he begins, carries on, and completes salvation, then my want of strength need not make me despair, for he is able, though I am not. He will work all my works in me, and I shall praise his name."

Oh, that the Spirit of God would lead my hearers to think of these things! Come and trust in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, and the good work will then have begun in you, a work which neither the world, the flesh, nor the devil can destroy; and then in the day of judgment you shall stand perfect in Christ Jesus before the throne.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Philippians i.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—427, 742, 739.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE BEGINNING OF MIRACLES WHICH JESUS DID.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 20TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him."—John ii. 11.

AT this time I shall not consider the relation of this miracle to total abstinence. The wine which Jesus made was good wine, and it was made of water: we are not likely to meet with anything of the kind in this country, where the wine is seldom made from the pure juice of the grape, and where it is not known who made it, or of what it is made. What is now called wine is a very different liquid from that which our Lord divinely produced. We use our Christian liberty to abstain from wine, and we judge that our Saviour would approve of our avoiding that which, in these days, makes our brother to offend. We who quit the intoxicating cup of to-day have our ways of viewing our Master's action in this instance, and we do not find it difficult to see wisdom and holiness in it; but even if we could not so interpret what he did, we should not dare to question HIM. Where others cavil, we adore. Even this is more than I meant to have said; for my object this morning is far removed from this controversy. I pursue a spiritual theme, and pray for help from on high to treat it aright.

We find this miracle only in John; neither Matthew, nor Mark, nor Luke, has a word of it. How did John come to know of it? In part it was because of his being present; but the preface in reference to the mother of Jesus came to him in another way, we think. Remember our Lord's words to John from the cross, and how it is written, "From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." I believe that no one heard the word of Jesus to his mother but Mary herself. It was after the manner of his delicacy to utter a reproof to her alone. But when John and the honoured mother conversed together, she, in all probability, reminded him of the miracle, and told him of her mistake. Saints gain precious things from God's poor and tried servants; and those who entertain the widow and the fatherless shall not go without reward. If my conjecture be correct, I see the holy modesty of "the mother of Jesus"—that she narrated her own fault, and did not forbid John to mention it. The Holy Spirit moved the evangelist to chronicle not only the miracle, but the error of Mary. It

was wise; for it is a conclusive argument against the notion that the mother of Jesus can intercede for us with her Son, and use authority with him. It is evident from this narrative that our Lord would tolerate no such idea, either in her mind or in ours. "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" is a sentence which rings the death-knell of any idea of our Lord's being moved by relationships according to the flesh. With all loving respect, he yet very decidedly shuts out all interference from Mary; for his kingdom was to be according to the spirit, and not after the flesh. I delight in believing, concerning the mother of Jesus, that though she fell into a natural mistake, yet she did not for an instant persist in it; neither did she hide it from John, but probably took care to tell it to him, that no others should ever fall into similar error by thinking of her in an unfitting manner.

Let it never be forgotten that "the mother of Jesus" had a very firm and practical faith in her Son, concerning whom angels and prophets had borne witness to her. She had seen him in his infancy, and watched him as a child; and it could not have been easy to believe in the divinity of one whom you have held as an infant to be nourished at your breast. From his marvellous birth she believed in him; and, now that she receives a kind of rebuff from him, her faith does not fail her; but she calmly turns to the servants and bids them stand ready to obey his commands, whatever they might be. She felt that he was quite certain to do the kind and needful thing. Even from his word, "Mine hour is *not yet* come," she probably gathered that his hour to work would arrive. Her faith was accompanied with imperfection, but yet it was of the right kind. It persevered under difficulty; and in the end it was triumphant, for the wine which had failed became plentiful again, and that which he provided was of surpassing quality. May we have a faith which will outlive a rebuke. May we, like Mary, sing, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour"; and may Jesus be to us, as he was to her—a trusted and beloved one upon whom our soul has learned to wait with confidence. With that end in view I have taken this subject for discourse. Oh, that his disciples may trust him more and more! John said, in another place, concerning the doings of our Lord, "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Truly, I can say, this sermon is preached that my beloved hearers may believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved.

We shall consider three things in connection with the text; first, the *significance of this beginning of miracles*. Read "signs" instead of "miracles," and you will be nearer the meaning of the original. This "beginning of miracles" was intended, like all that followed it, to be an instructive sign. Secondly, let us observe its *speciality as a manifestation:* "And manifested forth his glory." And then, thirdly, its *sufficiency as a confirmation of faith:* "And his disciples believed on him." It was calculated to establish their faith, and it did so.

I. To begin with, let us think upon THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS BEGINNING OF SIGNS. May the Holy Ghost graciously assist our thoughts, and warm our hearts!

The first sign-wonder that Christ wrought was the turning of water

into wine at the wedding at Cana of Galilee; and as we may often judge of a man's course by its beginning, and the beginning is often the key of all that follows, so we may learn the whole tenor of our Lord's miracles from this one.

Note, first, that this miracle *displayed his self-denial.* Our Lord had been a few days before in the wilderness, and after forty days' fasting he was an hungered. It was in his power to have commanded the stones to become bread; and had he done so the beginning of signs would have been a miracle wrought for his own necessities. But such a beginning would not have been like his life-course, and especially would it have been wide apart from the conclusion of his life when it was said of him, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." He would not make bread for himself, but he will make wine for others; and the fact that it was wine, and not bread, that he made, makes the miracle all the more remarkable. He did not merely make bread for men, which is a necessity; but he even went further, and made wine for them, which is a luxury, though he would not make even bread for himself. You see the sharp contrast between his refusal to help himself even to a crust of bread, and his readiness to give to men, not only what might be needful for life, but that which was only needful to their joy. When the wine failed, the only danger was that the bride and bridegroom would be pained, and the wedding dishonoured; and this our Lord prevents. He would not allow the humble festival of two villagers to come to an untimely end, when they had so kindly invited himself and his disciples. He repaid their courtesy by his spontaneous bounty. How greatly is our divine Lord to be admired and beloved by us! Behold his kindness! He has no selfishness about him. We can each one cry, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." He laid down his life for men—he gave his all to others. No selfish aim ever tinctured that consecrated life of his. For himself he reserved no measure or degree of power: for others he used that power without stint. This beginning of miracles is a display of unselfish working. Thoughtfulness for others shone in that miracle like the sun in the heavens.

Next, observe that this miracle *was marked with beneficence.* It was "the beginning of miracles," and the first is the keynote for the rest: happy are we that the first miracle is full of blessing! Moses commenced his work in Egypt with a miracle of judgment. He cast down a rod and it became a serpent, and he turned water into blood: but Jesus overcomes the serpent with the rod of Scripture, and turns water into wine. He works no plagues, but heals our sicknesses. Blessed Master,

> "Thine hand no thunder bears,
> No terror clothes thy brow,
> No bolts to drive our guilty souls
> To fiercer flames below."

The mission of Jesus is a happy one, and so it opens at a marriage feast; it is intended to bring joy and gladness to heavy hearts, and so it begins with a deed of royal bounty. At the coronation of kings the conduit in Cheapside has run with wine, and here the waterpots are filled with it to the brim. The after-miracles were all beneficent.

True, he withered a fruitless fig-tree, but it was a beneficent act to wither a tree which drew men out of their way by false promises of fruit, and so caused bitter pangs of disappointment to hungry and fainting wayfarers. It was a good thing to teach us all a practical lesson of sincerity at so small an expense as the withering of a good-for-nothing tree. All our Lord's actions towards men are full of royal benevolence and grace. There will be a day when the Lamb will be angry, and, as a Judge, he will condemn the ungodly; but while this dispensation lasts, he is to us all mercy, love, kindness, and bounty. If you, my hearer, will come to him, you will find that his heart will go out to you; and he will freely bless you with life, and rest, and peace, and joy. The Lord will bless you, and remove the curse far from you.

This beginning of miracles was wrought at a wedding to show great beneficence. Marriage was the last relic of paradise left among men, and Jesus hasted to honour it with his first miracle. Marriage is his Father's ordinance; for he it was that brought Eve to Adam; and our Lord wrought in harmony with the Father. He symbolically touched the very springs of manhood, and gave his sanction to that ordinance whereby the race is perpetuated. Jesus comes to a marriage, and gives his blessing there, that we may know that our family life is under his care. How much we owe to the joys of our domestic relationships! thereby life is raised from water into wine. We have sometimes thought it was almost a proof of the divinity of Christianity, that there could be homes so happy as some of our homes have been made by the presence of our dear Lord, whom we invited to our wedding-feast, and who has never gone away since, but has stayed with us all these happy years. It was a miracle which, by honouring marriage, confirmed an institution fraught with happiness to our race.

But, next, it was *a miracle most compassionate.* Our Lord's miracles were wrought in each case to meet a need. The wine had failed at the wedding-feast, and our Lord had come in at the time of the pinch, when the bridegroom was fearful of being made ashamed. That need was a great blessing. If there had been sufficient wine for the feast, Jesus had not wrought this miracle, and they had never tasted this purest and best of wine. It is a blessed need which makes room for Jesus to come in with miracles of love. It is good to run short, that we may be driven to the Lord by our necessity, for he will more than supply it. My dear hearer, if you have no need, Christ will not come to you; but if you are in dire necessity, his hand shall be stretched out to you. If your needs stand before you like huge empty water-pots, or if your soul is as full of grief as those same pots were filled with water up to the brim, Jesus can, by his sweet will, turn all the water into wine—the sighing into singing. Be glad to be very weak, that the power of God may rest upon you. As for me, I am more and more dependent upon the Lord for every particle of strength, and my deacons and elders know how often of a Sunday morning, before coming into the pulpit, I have thanked God that it is so. I am glad to be entirely dependent upon the Lord, and to have such a failure as to all my natural wine of ability that there may be occasion for my Lord to come in and supply wine of strength, of another and diviner

quality. We are likely to do our work best when we feel most our insufficiency, and are driven in upon God for help. If we go blundering to our service, we shall fail; but if we go tremblingly as to ourselves, by confidently looking up to the Lord, we shall be more than conquerors. If we have a great need, if something essential has given out, if we are likely to be despised for failure, let us in faith expect the Lord Jesus to come for our deliverance. I gather from this miracle that our Lord looks to man's necessities, and not to his possessions. He has an eye to our failures and needs, and he makes our distress the platform upon which he manifests his glory by supplying all our needs.

Further, I cannot help noticing *how condescending was this miracle!* We are told, twice, that it was performed at Cana in Galilee. Twice is this mentioned, that we may observe it well. Our Lord did not choose the high places of Jerusalem, nor any of the notable cities of Palestine, as the scene of his first miracle: but he went to a quiet village in Galilee, Galilee of the Gentiles, a district much despised, and there he wrought his first miracle at the city of rushes and canes—even Cana in Galilee. He wrought the sign, not on a spiritual and sacred occasion, nor before ecclesiastics and scientists. Some seem to fancy that all our Lord does must be done in churches or cathedrals. No, no: this miracle was in a private house, and that not at a prayer-meeting, or a Bible-reading, but at the marriage of a couple of poor peasants, names unknown. See how Jesus condescends to the commonplaces of life, and sheds a blessing upon the secular side of our existence!

Those who gave that feast were people of slender means. The wine would not have been so soon exhausted if they had been very rich. It is true that seven more came to the wedding than they had expected; but still, if they had been wealthy people, they would have had more than enough to satisfy seven extra guests; for Easterns kept open house for almost everybody during the marriage week. They were by no means an aristocratic party, or a set of Israel's notables. Why did not our Lord begin his miracles before the king, or the governor, or at least in the presence of the high priest, and the scribes and doctors of the law? Our Lord chose not to make his first appeal to the great and dignified. I feel much comfort in this fact: that he comes to common-place individuals is bliss to me. You and I may, in station and in wealth, be low down in the scale; but Jesus stoops to men of mean estate. To common spots like this Newington, on the south-side of the Thames, the Lord has come to visit his people; here, also, has he wrought his transformations, and many a watery life has been made rich and full through his grace.

My dear hearer, Jesus can come to you, though you are only a labourer, or a servant, or a poor tradesman, or the wife of an artisan. Our Lord loves the poor. He is a great frequenter of cottages. He stops not for grand occasions; but he makes his abode with the lowly. He is full of condescension.

This first of miracles was most munificent. He did not at the wedding multiply the bread; but he dealt with a luxury, and rejoiced their hearts with that which was as the pure blood of the grape. When our

Lord fed the multitudes in the wilderness, he might have given them each a bit of bread to keep them from famishing; but he never does things in a beggarly, workhouse style, and therefore he added fish, to be a relish with their bread. Our Lord not only gives existence, but happy existence, which is truly life. He does not give to men just enough for their necessity, but he gives up to the higher degree which we call enjoyment. Here he turns good wholesome water into a sweeter, richer, more nourishing beverage; perhaps we little know how truly good and sustaining that God-made drink was to those who were privileged to taste it. Our dear Master will give to all those who are his followers a joy unspeakable and full of glory. They shall not only have enough grace to live by so as barely to hope and serve; but they shall drink of "wines on the lees well refined," and shall have grace to sing with, grace to rejoice with, grace to fill them with assurance, and cause them to overflow with delight. Our Beloved has not only brought us to the house of bread, but to the banquet of wine. We have heaven here below. Jesus does not measure out grace by the drop, as chemists do their medicines; but he gives liberally, his vessels are filled to the brim. And the quality is as notable as the quantity: he gives the best of the best—joys, raptures, and ecstasies. O my soul, at what a royal table dost thou sit! He daily loadeth thee with benefits.

What a gracious miracle it was! How free! How unconstrained! He did not need pressing to do it. Mary must not interfere. Stand back, good woman; for the Lord knows what need there is without thy telling him. Dear friend, you think perhaps that you must pray up to a certain quantity; but the Lord is much more ready to give than you are to pray. It is not your prayer that will make him willing to bless you; for he is willing even now to do for you exceeding abundantly above what you ask or even think.

To obtain the supply of wine, it is noteworthy that nothing was required from men but what was very simple and easy. Hasten, ye obedient servants, to fetch water: just draw it from the well; pour it into those large waterpots: that is all you have to do! The Lord Jesus does not come to us with hard conditions and exacting terms. Dream not that, to be saved, you have to do or feel some great thing. As you are you may believe in Jesus to eternal life. Have faith enough to draw out at the Lord's bidding, and, to your own amazement, there will be wine where aforetime there was only water. The Lord, by his Spirit, can come and change your heart, and renew your spirit, so that where only a little natural thought has been, there will be spiritual life and feeling. He will do this without pressing and persuading. Grace is free. Jesus has a tender heart towards needy sinners: the spear has laid it open, a prayer will touch it.

The first miracle was *prophetic*. At a wedding our Lord begins his signs; to a marriage-feast he invites us now; at a glorious marriage-supper all will end. The story of our Bible ends like all well-told tales, with—they were married, and lived happy ever afterwards: for proof read the Book of the Revelation. Our Lord will come to celebrate a wedding between himself and his church, and all the wine they will drink at that high festival will be of his own providing,

and all the joy and bliss will be of his own giving. He is the sun of heaven's day; he is the glory of the glorified. He will take care that throughout the millennial age, yea, and throughout eternity, the joy of his chosen shall never fail; but they shall joy in God and in himself without measure and without bound.

Our Lord began with this special miracle, as if to show us that he had come here to transform and transfigure all things; to fulfil the law and its types, putting into it substance and reality; to take man and lift him up from a fallen creature into a heaven-born son and heir. Jesus has come to unswathe this planet of her mists, and to array it in garments of glory and beauty. Soon shall we see new heavens and a new earth. The new Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Jesus has come to elevate, and to fulfil; and he gives the token of this in this beginning of signs.

II. Secondly, I want you to notice in this miracle ITS SPECIALITY AS A MANIFESTATION. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory." I believe that there is a very clear connection between the first chapter of this Gospel and the passage before us. John in the first chapter said, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Here you have an unveiling of that grace and glory.

Observe that *he manifested forth his glory.* Truly, he glorified the Father, for that was his great end and aim; but yet he manifested forth his own glory in that very act. Notice that it was his own glory which was manifested. This was never said of any prophet or saint. Moses, Samuel, David, Elias—none of these ever manifested their own glory; indeed, they had no glory to manifest. Here is one greater than a prophet; here is one greater than the holiest of men. He manifested his own glory: it could not be otherwise. I feel that I must adore my Lord Jesus while I read these words. Jesus revealed his own glory as God and man. During all those former years it had been veiled. He had been a boy obedient at home, a young man industrious as a carpenter at Nazareth; then his glory was a spring shut up, a fountain sealed; but now it began to flow forth in the ruddy stream of this great miracle. If you will think of it, you will see more clearly what glory it was. He was a man like other men, and yet at will he turned water into wine. He was a man with a mother: his mother was there as if to remind us that he was born of woman. He was a man with a mother, and yet he was so truly "God over all," that he created, by his will, an abundance of wine. He was but one among many wedding guests, with his six humble followers; but yet he acted the Creator's part. He sat not arrayed in high priest's garments, nor did he wear the Pharisee's phylacteries, nor any other form of ornament betokening ecclesiastical office or profession; yet he did greater wonders than they could attempt. He was simply a man among men, and yet he was God among men. His wish was law in the world of matter, so that water received the qualities of wine. Adore him, brethren! Adore him,

reverently! Bow low before him who was a man, a real man, and yet wrought as only Jehovah himself can work! Worship him who counts it not robbery to be equal with God, and yet is found among the guests at a lowly marriage, manifesting his glory even there.

Observe, *he manifested his glory by operating beyond the power of nature.* Nature does not in an instant turn water into wine: if this be done, it must be by the direct hand of the Lord. It is true there are processes by which the dewdrop enters the berry of the grape and is gradually, by secret arrangements, turned into refreshing juice; but by what power could water be taken from an earthen vessel and be transmuted into wine while being carried to the table? None but God himself could do this, and as Jesus did it, he therein displayed his Godhead. By doing this he showed that he had all power on earth. He can do as he wills, and by this one act of creation, or transformation, he makes manifest the glory of his power.

He did this in part by operating without any instrument. When Moses sweetened the bitter water it was by a tree which the Lord showed to him. When Elisha purged the springs he threw salt into the water. We have no instrumentality here. Whenever our Lord did use visible means he took care to select such as in themselves were evidently insufficient for the purpose, if not opposed to his design: as, for instance, when he healed the blind man by making clay with spittle, and putting it on his eyes—a thing to blind him, rather than to open his eyes. Here, however, our Lord had no instrument whatever. He did not even speak a word, and say, "Water, blush into wine." No, he simply willed, and it was done. How divinely doth he manifest his glory in this respect!

And *he operated so easily and so majestically*, that he therein reminds us of the method and way of the great God. He simply says, "Fill the water-pots," and the servants do his bidding with enthusiasm, for he is Master of all minds. "Draw out now," he says, and in the process of bearing it to the ruler of the feast, the water is turned into wine. Here is no effort, no breathing as of one gathering up his strength to perform a feat. The earth revolves, but the wheel of nature never grinds upon its axle. God acts by his laws in a perfectly natural and unconstrained manner. Creation and providence abide in that majestic silence which comes of omnipotence. All goes easily where God is. With his own will he can do all things *for us*, and in a moment turn the waters of our grief into joy.

Our Lord manifested his glory by *operating naturally and without display.* I really believe that if you could have worked this wonder, you would have said to the ruler of the feast, "Call upon all the guests to remark that the wine has failed, and I am about to create a new supply. See this huge waterpot. Mark how I have it filled with water, that you may know that there is no wine in it. Observe me while I work the transformation." Then you would have spoken aloud, or you would have gone through a series of performances. Jesus did nothing of the kind. He hates display. He will not have his kingdom come with observation. He shuns pomp, noise, and ceremony; but acts like a God whose wonders are too many to be made matters of note to himself. It was Godlike on our Lord's part

to perform so great a work without appearing to be doing anything uncommon.

That he did literally perform the miracle, was certified by impartial witnesses. John, or Philip, or the whole six, might have said, "Master, we will fill the water-pots with water." But this must not be so, lest there should be a suspicion of collusion between the Master and the disciples. The ordinary servants must fill the waterpots with water. Again, the disciples would have been very pleased to bear the wine to the ruler of the feast, saying, "Here is the wine which our great and good Master has made for you." No; the servants shall bring in the wine, and say nothing at all about whence it came; and the chief witness that what they bring is really wine, and wine of the best quality, shall be the master of the ceremonies—a gentleman not at all spiritually-minded, but one who has been at many such feasts, that knows the custom of them, and has a proverb ready to set it forth. He was evidently a man who was a judge of the quality of wine, and we may safely accept his verdict—"Thou hast kept the best wine until now." The less spiritual the man in this case, the better the witness to the reality of the miracle. If he had been a follower of Jesus he might have been suspected of being in the swim with him and his disciples; but you can see he is a man of another mould altogether. God's work is fact, not fiction: it appeals to faith, not to imagination. God doth his transforming work in such a way that he will have witnesses ready to attest it. As when Christ rose from the dead there were appointed witnesses to certify it, so his first miracle is certified beyond all question as real and true by the best of witnesses. There was a special reason for this. Oh, my beloved hearers, if you come to Christ he will not deceive you; his blessings are not dreams. If you will come and trust in Jesus, the work he will do for you will be as real as what he did at Cana. Even the ungodly shall be obliged to see that God has made a change in you. When they see your new life, they will say, "Here is something good, the like of which we never saw in him before." Come, I pray you, and take Christ to be your all; and he will be, in very truth, all that you need. Trust him with your sin, and he will bring real pardon. Trust him with your trouble, he will give you perfect rest. Trust him with your evil nature, he will renew you. He is no pretender to deeds which he does not perform. He did by the witness of everybody at the marriage actually turn water into wine of special quality; and so he can now transform your character and make it such as nature, when best educated, can never produce. I say again, the speciality of this manifestation lies in this, that it revealed the Lord Jesus as by his own almighty power uplifting everything he touched, transforming men, and things, and facts, into nobler ones than they were before, or could ever have become. This is the speciality of the manifestation of Christ: he saith, "Behold, I make all things new." He brings forth the best last. He raises the poor from hunger to feasting. He uplifts fallen humanity into something so glorious that it stands, in his person, near to the throne of God. In all this Christ is revealed, and his name is glorified.

III. And now, lastly, I think we have here A SUFFICIENCY FOR THE

CONFIRMING OF FAITH. It is said, "And his disciples believed on him."

Brothers, notice something here. How did John know that the disciples believed on him? Why, because he was one of them, and he himself believed on him. The best witness is that of one who has a share in the fact. When you feel a thing yourself, you have a full assurance of it. John knew that the other five disciples believed on Jesus by what they said to him; for their feelings coincided with his own. Let us see to it that we also share in the faith which the marvels of our Lord are designed to produce.

Note, that the guests at that feast all partook of the wine, but the disciples at that feast had something far better; they had an increase of faith. An increase of faith is better far than all the dainties of a feast. Others ate and drank; but these men saw God in Christ Jesus manifesting his glory.

Our enquiry is, What was there in this miracle which would tend to confirm their faith? Notice that I say *to confirm* their faith. It did not originate their faith, but it established it. Their faith had been originated by the word of the Lord, preached by John the Baptist: they had believed in Jesus as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Secondly, they had enjoyed personal intercourse with Jesus, by going to him, and dwelling with him. This had strengthened their faith greatly. And now they begin to taste of the benefit of being associated with Jesus, and to see for themselves what Jesus was able to do. Thus their faith grew. His disciples believed on him already, but this miracle confirmed their confidence.

The miracle abundantly justified the disciples in implicitly believing in Jesus; for it is manifest that *one miracle proves the power to work every miracle.* If Christ can turn water into wine by his will, he can do anything and everything. If Jesus has once exercised a power beyond nature, we may readily believe that he can do it again: there is no limit to his power. He is God, and with God all things are possible. Thus, the first miracle rightly confirmed their faith.

But, next, *it showed their Master's readiness to meet unexpected difficulties.* Nobody had foreseen that the wine would fail. Jesus had not gone to the marriage prepared and primed, as we say among men. The demand came all of a sudden, and the supply came too: the wine ran out, and he was ready for the difficulty. Does not this confirm your faith? Christ is always ready for every emergency. Something may happen to-morrow that you have not thought of; Christ will be ready for the unexpected. Between here and heaven you will meet with a great many unlikely events; but they will not be surprises to him. He has clear foresight: when the trial comes he will provide: "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen."

Again, their faith was confirmed because *he had showed that he would allow nothing to fail with which he was connected.* I like to feel sure that Jesus is with me in any business, for then I know that the pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand. True, it was not the wedding of one of his relatives or disciples, but still it was a marriage at which he was a guest; and he would not suffer it to be said that they ran short

of provisions when he was there. His connection with the feast may seem to have been remote, but it was a connection; and slight connections are observed by our Lord Jesus. O my soul, if I can but touch the hem of his garment, virtue will come from him to me. I get into the same boat with Jesus, and if I drown Jesus must drown too: and therefore I know that I am safe! O my heart, if I do but get the hand of Christ in my hand, or my hand in his hand, I am linked with him, and none can separate us. In that union is my life, my safety, my success; for nothing that he touches, or that touches him, will ever fail. He is only one of a party at a wedding, but because he is there things must go well. I think this must have encouraged the disciples much when, in after days, they began to preach: their confidence would be that Jesus was with them, and they must prevail. They were poor, unlearned men, and all the scholarship of the age was arrayed against them; but they said to themselves, "We fear not, for Jesus is in this controversy, and he will see it through." Let us get Christ into our quarrel for God's covenant and truth, and the battle is no longer doubtful. If in the matter of your salvation faith brings the Saviour into the business, you may rest assured of eternal life.

It showed to them, next—and this must have greatly confirmed their faith—that *he could use the poorest means*. To make wine the Lord had only water and six large water-pots. Yes, but he can make better wine out of water than men can make out of grapes. Behold his vats and his winepresses, six water-pots of stone. You and I—what are we? Well, we are poor earthen vessels, and a little cracked, I fear. There is little enough in us, and what there is is weak as water; but the Lord can bring forth from us a wine which will cheer the heart of God and man—words of faith which will please God and save man. The disciples would in after days know themselves to be nothing but earthen vessels, but they would remember that their Lord could work miracles with them.

When they saw *the majestic ease of his working*, do you not think it confirmed their faith? He did not call for angels, he did not deliver a long prayer, much less repeat a sacred incantation. He did but will it, and the deed was done. Next time they came into a difficulty, the disciples would believe that the Lord could easily enough appear for them. They would stand still and see the salvation of God. In some way or other the Lord would provide, and he would do wonders without trouble to himself. Brethren, we shall come out at the big end of the horn yet, for God is with us.

It showed them, also, that henceforth *they need never be anxious*. Will you that read your Greek Testament notice the expression here? Is it said, "His disciples believed him"? No. Is it "Believed *in* him"? No. "Believed *on* him"? Yes. It is so in our version; but *into* would be more correct. The Greek is "*eis*": his disciples believed into him. They so believed that they seemed to submerge themselves in Jesus. "Into him"—think what that means! John, and Andrew, and Nathanael, and the others, cast their life-long concerns upon Jesus, and felt that they need never have another care. Jesus would see them through to the end. They would leave everything to him. Mary took the matter a little into her own hands,

but she erred therein; the disciples entered into Jesus by the open door of this confirming miracle, and there they rested. Be this your condition—"Casting all your care on him, for he careth for you." They believed right into Jesus. It is one thing to believe in him, and another thing to believe him; it is a restful thing to believe on him, but best of all to believe right into him so that your very personality is swallowed up in Christ, and you feel the bliss of living, loving, lasting union with him. Those six men could not have produced a drop of wine for the wedding; but count their Master in with them, and the seven could flood the streets with it, if there had been need. Entering into partnership with Jesus, their faith rose as a morning without clouds. Now were they sure, steadfast, strong; for their weak and watery faith had gained the fulness and richness of generous wine.

I have done when I have said to any here who are undecided—see, my dear hearer, Jesus Christ will come and visit such as you are. He is willing to go to plain men's houses, even when they have a feast going on. Ask him to come to you just as you are.

See how he is able to bless human joy! You think, perhaps, that you will go to Jesus next time you are in sorrow; but I say to you, come to him at once, while you are in joy. You that are getting on in business, you that rejoice over a new-born child, you that are lately married, you that have passed an examination with honours, come to Jesus in your joy, and ask him to raise your happiness to a higher degree and quality, and elevate it till it touches the joy of the Lord. Jesus is able to raise you, beloved friend, from what you now are into something better, fuller, grander, nobler, holier, and more God-like. May he do it now! Believe in him, believe him, believe on him, believe into him, and it shall be done. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

John i. 35—51; ii. 1—11.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—257, 775, 435.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ROBBERS OF GOD.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 27TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me."—Malachi iii. 8.

THESE prophets would have made poor royal chaplains, if those who dwell in kings' houses have to use smooth speech. Malachi here charges the people with robbery, and with the very worst form of it, namely, sacrilege. He speaks for the Lord, and says, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me." It ill becomes the messengers of heaven to be the flatterers of rebels. If they should descend to such baseness, they might well expect that their Maker would take them away. The Lord sends his servants to speak the truth in all its plainness, to denounce sin with all fidelity, and to publish God's sentence of condemnation against those who continue in their iniquity. Men's souls are to be dealt with honestly, and, if need be, sternly. God's truth is to be handled with vigorous plainness; for the Lord hath said, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully."

Yet notice that Malachi constantly mixes up promises with threatenings; and while he is like a sharp two-edged sword against the evil of the people, he is as the balm of Gilead to those who feel their disease of sin, and desire to be healed of it. Between the peals of thundering warning there are silver showers of gracious encouragement. He has tempest for sin; but peace for those who confess it. Almost the next verse after our text is, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Faithful ministries have in them a blending of the law to drive with the gospel to draw. Brethren, we must use the law for its ordained purpose. If we omit the discovery and denunciation of evil, we have neglected a very essential part of our duty; for if men are not convinced of sin, how will they desire pardon? If conscience be not awakened, to what can we address ourselves? It is in vain to bring forth the promises, for the promises are no more sweet to the self-righteous than bread to a

man filled with dainties. What cares a man for justification by faith who has the conceit that he is already justified by his own acts? Only those who feel their wounds will plead for heavenly surgery. I pray that I may so preach this morning that, while I shall not be harsh in spirit, I may bear hard upon those spirits which are resting in their own innocence. I wish so to speak that we shall all of us see our own shortcomings, so as to be startled into confession and prayer, and led humbly to trust in the great sacrifice.

It is a very serious charge which the prophet brings in the text: he calls men thieves and robbers. He charges the whole nation with robbing God. We ought seriously to consider a charge so serious, and, specially, since at this day it may lie against ourselves. We shall come to this consideration, noticing in the text *astonishment indicated:* "Will a man rob God?" The prophet asks in amazement, as if such a thing could not be. Secondly, we shall spend a little time in pressing home the solemn charge. This will come under the head of *confession assisted.* We shall mention, in detail, certain forms which this robbery may take, in order that we may search our own conduct, and see whether we are guilty of the crime. If guilty, may we be moved to repentance of the sin, and faith in the glorious Sin-bearer, through whom we may be pardoned, even though guilty of treason-felony against the King of kings! Lastly, we shall help the penitent to the right way, under the head of *repentance directed.* If we have robbed God, though the crime is in itself most terrible, it is not beyond the reach of mercy. There is forgiveness with God for this also; for the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, cleanseth us from all sin. I shall speak about the way by which forgiveness may be obtained. Oh, for the Holy Spirit to guide mind, and heart, and tongue in this solemn matter!

I. First, then, in the text there is ASTONISHMENT INDICATED: "Will a man rob God?" The question is asked as if it were improbable, if not impossible. A man, an insignificant creature, dependent upon his God for the breath whereby he lives, will he rob God, the good, the just, the great and terrible One, who can crush him in a moment? "Will *a man* rob GOD?"

In the first place, the astonishment arises from the fact that *the action is altogether unnatural.* It is illogical, and self-condemnatory: if we have a God, how dare we rob him? Look at the heathen; they must have a god; and since they know no better god, the heathen make to themselves a god of wood, of stone, or of clay. When they have made these false gods, they pay them homage, as if indeed they were gods. For them they build temples, and altars, and shrines. Nations in the olden times had no banks; but treasures deposited in temples were safe from robbery. It was not supposed that a thief would break into a temple: to do so was a flagrant crime. There was an awe upon the minds of men which rendered it an audacious felony to rob their deities, false though they were. Men who would have plundered palaces, kept back from the temple of Jupiter, or Minerva, or Diana. No man would rob even an image which he thought to be a god. If the heathen would not rob their gods, shall we dare to do so who have so much light as to the one

living and true God? Will men who profess and call themselves Christians venture upon a profanity from which the heathen retreated with a shudder? Even Goths and Vandals, in the days of their invasions of civilization, have been known to stand back at the door of a church when the minister of Christ has come forward to protest against its plunder. If the fierce heathen learned to respect the holy place, surely it will be a high misdemeanour if we, knowing the true God, dare to break in upon the sacred enclosure of his honour, and rob him of his glory, which is his spiritual treasure. To rob God is a superfluity of naughtiness, an extravagance of crime, an excess of presumptuous provocation. Can man be guilty of it? "Will a man rob God?"

In the next place, to rob God *is terribly daring*. If the thief robs his fellow man, who is his equal, he has cause to fear the law: he should reckon upon being searched out by vigilance and punished by justice. But what are the police and the magistrates and the judges of this lower sphere compared with the Judge of all the earth? "Will a man rob God?" The crime is the more audacious because done in God's presence. If the robber could go behind the Lord's back to rob him, his insolence would not be so manifest; but since the Lord's eye is everywhere present, the offence is rank and impudent. The worst of thieves will not often steal from us to our face; robbery is done in the dark, or on the sly, or by a cunning trick; but since no place is behind the back of God, and there is no spot where his eye is not observant, when a man robs God, he does it before his face. "Will a man rob God?" What! God, whose eyes are fixed upon him? Will he thus defy his Maker? We lift up our hands in amazement, that such a crime should be even conceived, much less committed. Yet, before I have done this morning, I shall have to show that many of us, in divers ways, have been guilty of this audacious crime. "Will a man rob God?"

Furthermore, *it is shamefully ungrateful!* God hath made us, and not we ourselves; therefore we are bound to serve him, and every righteous instinct forbids our robbing him. Shall a creature injure its Creator? If we live, it is by his forbearance. "Will a man rob God" who spares him? If saved, it must be by his divine redemption; will a man rob his Redeemer? If provided with food for the body, it must be by God's daily bounty; will a man rob his constant Benefactor? O thou Preserver of men, will men rob thee? Believers in the Lord Jesus, God is your Father, and from you this crime would have a sevenfold heinousness. Will a man rob his own Father? Can it be, that one in whose heart there pulses the life of God, would be guilty of such an infamy as to rob God? I fear it is so; but in such a case it is ingratitude of so black a type as to be well-nigh incredible. Ingratitude in every land, and in every age, has been abhorred of just men. It is a fiendish vice. It is at once contemptible and unendurable: we not only despise, but hate it. Every voice hoots down ingratitude. Yet when a man robs God, it is ingratitude written in capital letters; ingratitude that will sink the soul into the lowest hell. "Will a man rob God?" The Lord deliver us from conduct so base!

It is senselessly injurious to the man himself. To rob God is to plunder ourselves. The man who lives for God does, indeed, and of a truth, in the highest sense, live to his own happiness. He that robs God of himself robs himself of God; and to lose God is to miss our highest good. To rob God is to waste our own substance; yea, to write one's own death-warrant. Belshazzar takes from Jehovah the holy vessels, and drinks wine therefrom at his drunken banquet; but it is written, "That night was Belshazzar slain." When a man robs God by withholding more than is meet from the poor, it tendeth to poverty. None rob God and really prosper. There is that wastes his substance upon his own lusts, and so robs God; but his profligacy tends to disease, sadness of heart, and eternal ruin. When a man robs God he is despoiling his own estate. Every penny that is withheld from God's treasury is put into a bag that is full of holes. Such gain impoverishes. He that serveth God brings a blessing upon himself and his posterity; he that robbeth God should listen to the words which follow my text: "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me." Because of this cometh the devourer which swallows up the estate, the waster that eats up the increase of the field, and the destroyer which shipwrecks the result of commerce. If a man knew that when he robbed God, he was cutting the throat of his own happiness, burying in a wretched sepulchre his peace for the present and his hope for the future, surely he would pause ere he laid his hand upon the Lord's heritage! In the sight of the curse that goes with the injustice, "Will a man rob God?"

Once more: "Will a man rob God" *when he is so certain of punishment!* A man who is a thief hopes to escape; for human search can be baffled. If he were sure that he would be taken, tried, and condemned, the burglar would not break into the house; but he hopes by dexterity to evade, or by false statements to escape from the hand of the law, and therefore he ventures upon the crime. Now, no man can hope to escape when he robs God. O robber, where wilt thou go? In what secret place wilt thou hide thyself? It was said of a Roman emperor, when Rome was at its highest power, that for him the whole world was but one great gaol, in which all who offended Cæsar were prisoners. Wherever an offender fled, the Roman law would reach him. For him there was no foreign land which could shelter him in exile, no distant country in which he could live unseen. Once obnoxious to Cæsar, he was a doomed man. Whither, O rebel against God, canst thou go? If thou shouldst mount to heaven, there he reigns in splendour; if thou shouldst dive to hell, there he rules in terror. Far off upon the sea his hand would reach thee. Though thy bark should fly before the tempest, he would outstrip thee. Darkness affords no concealment, and the grave no shelter. God is everywhere, and his justice finds out his enemies. Thus saith the Lord, "Though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them." "Will a man rob God," when he thus involves himself in sure detection and punishment? Yes, the robber of God is already detected. God has seen him in the act. The witness against him is

unerring. "Will a man rob God?" How can he be so foolhardy? Will he stretch out his hand against God, and strengthen himself against the Almighty? Will he run upon him with a stiffneck, upon the thick bosses of his bucklers? Let him be wise, and no more dream of robbing the Infinite One.

Put all these things together, and I think you will share the prophet's astonishment at the crime of robbing God, and you will earnestly pray, "God grant that we may never be guilty of such wickedness." We hope we have been kept from the worst forms of this sin; for we regard it with abhorrence, as the deadliest of evils.

II. And now, secondly, I am coming to closer quarters with you than under the first head. Now we occupy ourselves with CONFESSION ASSISTED. I would aid my hearers in examining their lives and hearts, holding a candle for conscience.

I will mention, first, *common forms of this robbery*. Here are some of them. Many men, throughout a life which has been prolonged by God's forbearance, have never given to God even the semblance of worship. Neither in their hearts, nor in private prayer, nor in their families have they paid worship to the Lord. They have never once set up an altar in their family, nor called upon the name of the Lord. It may be there are men and women here who are parents and heads of households, and yet after thirty, forty, fifty, or more years, they have never rendered unto God the glory due unto his name. Never have they sung his praises with delight, nor offered prayer in humility. The holy Name has never been on their lips, except in carelessness or profanity. Do I speak too roughly when I take such a person by the hand, and say to him, "You have robbed God throughout your whole life"? He made you, but he has had nothing from you; he has fed you day by day, and in his hand your breath is, but you have done him no service. If a man buys a cow, he counts upon its milk; if he keeps a horse, he looks for its labour; if he owns a dog, he expects it to come to his whistle. Will God make you, feed you, keep you in life, and bless you; and is he to have no return? "Will a man rob God?" Many of you think, if you maintain you families, pay your debts, and live soberly, all is done that you need think about. God is nowhere and nothing to you. As far as you can do so, you have put God out of the world: you live as if there were no God. My friend, this cannot be right. This injustice to the greatest and the best of beings, this want of thought of him who daily thinks of you, must be wrong! Bow your head in shame, and confess your fault at once.

Many are in the habit of robbing God in another way. When God prospers them, and things go well with them, you may hear them exclaim, "I am a lucky fellow! Bless my lucky stars!" By speeches of this sort they rob God of the thanks they owe him. It is silly and wicked to talk about a fictitious power called fortune, or good luck. Though the hand of God is distinctly to be seen in the prosperity which men enjoy, they refuse to see it, and talk of chance. God forgive you, you are robbing him of his praise.

Others, when they prosper in the world, pay homage to themselves, their industry, their prudence, or their business tact. Self-made men

they call themselves. Self-made men are, as a rule, very badly made: it would be a great mercy if they could be broken up, and made anew in Christ Jesus. But when a man begins to brag and boast of what he has gathered by his own genius, he robs God of the honour due to his goodness. Look at Nebuchadnezzar: he walks through his great city; he marks the broad walls of Babylon, and admires the hanging gardens, bearing forests high in the air; and he exclaims, "Behold this great Babylon which I have builded!" A few weeks after, as a maniac, he was eating grass with oxen, having been driven from the dwellings of men. When his hair had grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws, then he knew how soon the glorious Lord of heaven and earth can lay the mighty monarch level with the beasts. Then he humbled himself, and blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion. I do not wish that you should be bereft of your wits, but you may be. Peradventure, if your best reason returned, even that which pride has, for a while, driven away, it might serve the purpose I desire; for you would remember that it is God that gives you power to get wealth. Prosperity, however much it may come by your own industry, is, nevertheless—when you get to the bottom of it—to be ascribed to the great favour of God, who permits you to enjoy health and strength, to exercise your industry, and to carry out your undertakings. By forgetfulness of the fountain of all blessings, a man robs God.

I must add here that even men who, in their hearts, fear the Lord, may be guilty of this sin. If the Lord has seen fit to make you useful, it will be horrible if you take the praise of it to yourself. It is very easy for the preacher, when his congregation is large, to think, "This is due to my eloquence"; and when there are conversions, he may be wicked enough to whisper to himself, "This is due to my fidelity." Ah, me! Shall we sacrifice to our own net because it is full of fishes? Shall the axe that fells the tree glorify itself against the hand that uses it? The Lord grant we may never fall into this sin! Are you seeking to win the souls of your children for Christ? Yet, maybe, you do not gather large classes, nor see many conversions. May it not be because the Lord could not trust you with great success? Some workers must not succeed, for it would be at the cost of their souls: they would take the glory to themselves, and so rob God. I knew a man, whom God greatly blessed in a certain place, so that his preaching turned it upside down. He built a large house of prayer and filled it with eager hearers. There was such a stir as had not been known before. He was a successful soul-winner, *and he knew it.* Alas, he knew it, and you could see that he knew it! He was a man of remarkable ability as a speaker, *and he knew it.* He was eminent for influence, and his speech and bearing betrayed that eminence. Where is he now? I cannot tell you. But there came a sudden stop to usefulness, a foolish action, and the man became an affliction to the gracious. If we set up for masters, instead of being obedient servants, we shall be ordered on foreign service, and shall no more see the King's face. Alas, our robbery of God by assuming honour for ourselves, may prove that the root of the matter

was never in us, and that our spiritual power was only lent to us, as it was to Judas, but we were never children of the kingdom. "Will a man rob God?" Ah, me; how common are these offences! The Lord preserve us from them!

Now, I will mention *doctrinal forms* of this evil. "Will a man rob God?" Oh, my friends, how many in these evil days rob God in this fashion! Some deny the godhead of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I know no greater robbery than to take away from the ever-blessed Son of God his right to be regarded as equal with God. To think of the eternal Word as only the creature of a day, is base robbery. To regard him whose name is Emmanuel, "God with us" as a mere teacher or exemplar, but not "very God of very God," is treason-felony. If any man here has so robbed the Christ of God, the Lord have mercy upon him. "Will a man rob God?"

Some rob the Holy Spirit of his personality. He is spoken of by them as an influence, but not as true God. He is spoken of as "*It*," instead of "*He*"; and he is not worshipped as one person of the blessed Trinity in Unity. Too many practically ignore him, and preach as if they could do without his aid. Thus they rob him of his true position in reference to the things of God. O friends, beware of robbing God the Holy Ghost; for this is to tread on tender ground.

It is possible also to rob the divine Father. In preaching the sacrifice of Christ it is possible to extol the Son at the expense of the Father. It will never do to make it appear that Jesus died to make the Father merciful. God the ever-blessed, the first person of the sacred Trinity, is love, and therefore he gave his Son to die for men. We are to worship the Son even as we worship the Father; but to magnify the love of the Son above the love of the Father would be to rob God. May none of us dishonour any one person of the sacred Three. Concerning each divine person let us sing—

> "Then let us adore, and give him his right,
> All glory and power, and wisdom and might;
> All honour and blessing, with angels above,
> And thanks never-ceasing, for infinite love."

Though we understand not the mystery of the Trinity, let us believe and worship, and so escape the sin of robbing God.

Beloved, some yield to the temptation to limit the legal claims of God. They rob him of his rights under his just and righteous law. It has been taught by certain divines that God does not require from us perfect obedience to his law, but only asks *sincere* obedience. If we go as far as we can, that will suffice—so they tell us. This is not true; for the law of the Lord stands fast for ever, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." To tone down the demands of this perfect Law, and absolve men from their duty to obey every portion of it, is to rob God, and to teach others to do so. Although by reason of our sinfulness we cannot render perfect obedience, God is not to be blamed for that, neither is he to lose his due. If I cannot pay, yet the debt remains. I am under obligation to the law to keep it; and it is written, "Cursed is every

one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." It is ours to come before God saying, "The law is holy, and just, and good; but I am carnal, sold under sin." If we do not consent unto the law that it is good, we rob God of his goodness, wisdom, and justice in making such a law.

Not a few rob God also by rebelling against his sovereignty. I have known men bite their lip and grind their teeth in rage when I have been preaching the sovereignty of God. Yet is it true; and who is he that replieth against God? He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy; he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion. He demandeth, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" Men seem to think that God is under obligation to grant salvation to guilty men; that if he saves one he must save all. They talk about rights, as if any man had any right before the throne of God, except the right to be punished for his sin. Mercy can only be shown to the guilty on the ground of the royal prerogative. It must be the free act of God's grace, done at his own good pleasure if any guilty man be saved from death. The doctrinaires of to-day will allow a God, but he must not be King: that is to say, they choose a god who is no god, and rather the servant than the ruler of men. We, however, declare on God's behalf, that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy"; and at the sound of this doctrine they stamp their foot with rage. They would rob God of his crown, and leave him neither throne, nor will. This will not do for me; my heart delights to say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Whatsoever is *his* pleasure shall by *my* pleasure. Even if the Lord condemn me, I cannot say that he is unjust; but if he hath mercy upon me, I must ascribe it wholly to his free and sovereign grace. Rob not God of his sovereignty; but rejoice that the Lord reigneth and doeth as he wills.

I fear that many rob God of the glory of his free grace, which is akin to his divine sovereignty, and is one of the brightest jewels of his crown. God saveth not according to merit, but according to mercy. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life." Salvation is freely given, not because man merits it, but because Jehovah wills it. All salvation is of grace, and not of works. I say it is of *free grace*, and it is muttered that the expression is a tautology. I know it is; but we want to be understood. Salvation comes because God wills to save. Grace is given to the most unworthy of the sons of men, to show that it is of grace, and not of debt. But, ah! these knaves, they drag in human goodness or strength by the heels, if they cannot get it in in any other way. To spoil the freeness of sovereign grace, and so to rob God of glory, is the ambition of many a preacher. One drop of human merit put into a sea of free grace preaching will spoil it all. "If by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work." Stand to it, brethren, that by grace are we saved. In these evil days stand boldly out, and protest against every gospel that conceals sovereign grace as the fountain of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Now I will come closer home to certain of you, while I mention *practical forms* of this robbery of God. With too many God is robbed of that part of *time* which belongs to him. And what part of time does he claim? One day in seven. He has given six days to us to use for our business, but he has reserved one day in seven for himself, and this he has done for our good. Christ our Lord has taken away whatever of bondage there was about the Sabbath law, as interpreted by the Jewish Rabbis; and by example and by speech he has told us that acts of necessity, acts of mercy, and acts of piety are allowable on the Sabbath day. The bitter observance of the Sabbath was opposed by our Lord, that he might bring to us the true rest. Yet, in many ways, men are conspiring to rob God of the day which he has hallowed. The little which remains of sacredness about this day, is now being threatened, to our national injury. Give up the Sabbath, and you reduce the nation to slavery. A week without a Sabbath is perpetual bondage. This break of a day's rest makes it possible for the toiling man to live. Alas, at this day, the very highest in the land are setting the example of disregarding the sanctity of the Lord's-day! I grieve to have to say it of one who has been otherwise regarded; but so it is, that, by royal example, the day is turned from its holy purpose. It is not only from the ribald and the profane that our Christian Sabbath is in danger, but from those whose example has weight about it, because of the honour justly paid to long years of virtue. God forgive the error, and cause it to cease! Brethren, we must, to the utmost of our power, conserve for God his holy day, or we shall be guilty of robbing him.

Very sincerely did we sing just now,—

> "Welcome, sweet day of rest,
> That saw the Lord arise;
> Welcome to this reviving breast,
> And these rejoicing eyes."

All time is the Lord's due, and all the life of man. Let us not rob him of our youth. He says to the young, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Young man, do not rob God of your prime; do not give to the world and to sin the morning of your days, while the dew of youth is upon you. Rob not God of your early manhood, but give him your flower in its bud. Every day, and all the day, and the whole of life belongs to God. Do not let us waste a minute in that which would provoke him to anger; but let him have each moment, for he prepares for us an eternity of reward.

"Will a man rob God?" Yet many rob God by not giving him their hearts. "My son," said he, "give me thine heart." He claims yourself: give him yourself. He made you, and he alone can save you: give him yourself. Will a man rob God of himself? I pray you, do not so. Render to the Lord your spirit, soul, and body. Have you a faculty which you only use for self? You are robbing God; for the talent, the strength, the life you have are all his own. These are the pounds which you must put out to interest for your Lord. If even your single pound is not used for him, you will be found guilty of unfaithfulness in your stewardship.

Those may be said to rob God who have never borne testimony to the grace which they believe they have received. You have been saved, but you have never told anybody of the wondrous blessing—no, not your own wife. You have been converted—at least, you hope so; but you have never confessed it, even to your children. Are you not robbing God of the revenue of glory which would come to him through the testimony which you are sent into the world to bear? If all Christians were dumb as you are, God would have no witness left on the face of the earth. Will men rob God of the confirmation of his Word which a gracious experience furnishes?

You have influence; will you rob God of this also? We have all some influence, even as we all cast a shadow as we walk in the sun. Are you using your influence for God? If not, you are robbing him of a great gift which he meant you to use for the glory of his name, and the extension of his kingdom. Perhaps you have more than influence—you have power; for you are the head of a family, and you can command your household, and your children after you. Are you leading servants and children in a wrong road? You are the Lord-Lieutenant in your own little sphere, and are you using that power in a rebellious manner? Do you teach others to do what you yourself know to be evil? Alas, you rob God! Will you continue to rob God? In making you a father, a mother, an employer of labour, and so forth, the Lord has entrusted you with a measure of his own power: will you use it against your sovereign Lord? Are you a leader in society? Will you rob God? Are you a senator? Will you go into the Parliament House to vote for Acts which will be prejudicial to morals and religion? Are you a magistrate, and will you wink at evils? Will you tolerate the indecencies and immoralities of our streets? Shall justice be the servant of vice? God forgive men who thus rob God!

Will men rob God of his portion of their wealth? I must not leave this out; for it is needful to speak out in the matter of consecration of property. How many professors of religion are robbing God! If we are Christians, we profess that all we have belongs to God. You do not dispute that statement. Well, then, when a man hoards up all he can scrape together, is he not robbing God? When a man dies enormously rich, as many professing Christians have done, must they not have robbed God? Can it be said that they have discharged their stewardship aright when they have kept their Master's property for themselves? It is better for a Christian to die comparatively poor than enormously rich. Rich wills may go to show that the deceased did not use his pounds for his Lord, but for himself. Do not many Christians fail to see that God is the first owner of their possessions? They dribble out a little to his cause, but is there not robbery in that which is withheld? They could not have the face to deny something; and, as compared with their neighbours, they are even generous, but as compared with their obligations to God, have they not robbed him? If we spend upon ourselves beyond bounds, if we lay out upon luxury more than is meet, if we are superabundantly self-indulgent, and are not consecrating a fair proportion of our substance to the cause of God and the help of the poor, we are assuredly robbing

the Most High. I fear that many a wealthy man on his dying bed will find that gold makes a hard pillow. He will endure many a pang of conscience, if he has seen missions languish, the church of God impeded in her efforts, and a thousand good efforts nipped in the bud from lack of money which he might have given. The work of the Lord would never go a-begging, if believers were but commonly honest to their Redeemer's cause. If I plead like this, somebody raises an objection; but I cannot help it. I seek nothing for myself; but I urge my Master's claims. "Will a man rob God?"

I close this help to confession, which, I think, must have come home to many of you, when I say that with certain persons there are *peculiar forms* of this evil. When yonder friend lay sick, and thought himself at death's door, he said, "O Lord, raise me up"; and then he vowed unto the Lord to devote a portion of his means to holy purposes. If he has not kept that sacred promise, I put the question to him with emphasis, "Will a man rob God?" Many years ago, there came a friend to this place in fearful anxiety of mind. He told me that he had years before made a vow to give to God a very considerable amount, but he had delayed payment. The result at last was that his conscience troubled him, and he could get no rest either day or night. He was greatly relieved when he handed over the amount to the Orphanage, and College, and other works. Certainly he found it that day more blessed to give than to receive. When I thanked him for such large help, he said, vehemently, "Do not thank me. I thank you for taking the trouble to use this money for the Lord. It is a great relief to me to be rid of this amount, for I fear I have not acted honestly towards the Lord my God." Vow slowly, pay promptly. Do not hasten to say, "I will do this or that"; but when thou hast once said it, see that thou do it, and do it to the full. Be not like Ananias and Sapphira, who kept back part of the price of the land which they professed to give to the Lord and to his church. Never let us boast that we have done this or that for the Lord, if we have not really done so to the letter; for in so doing we shall stand on hazardous ground. I leave the matter with God and your own consciences, only asking once more the solemn question, "Will a man rob God?"

III. Very briefly, I would conclude with REPENTANCE DIRECTED. If any here are convicted by their own conscience, I ask them not to go out as they did who were convicted by our Lord; but I do ask that while we remain here we may *feel a deep sense of shame*, because of our shortcomings towards God. If in any one of the ways mentioned we have robbed God, may confusion cover us. You that cannot say you have served Him at all, repent of such a robbery of God. You strong men and lovely women who are sitting here—who gave you your strength and beauty? Have you all your lives lived for self? What! no thought of God? Your Creator you have forgotten; he to whom you rightly belong you have practically denied. Confess the wrong; humble yourself about it; and may God the Holy Spirit work a sound conviction which shall lead you to real penitence.

Next, as much as lieth in you, *make restitution*. See how the prophet put it. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house." God requireth that of which you have

defrauded him. You are not to say, "I am sorry," and then go on in the same unrighteous manner. If you have wronged any man, never rest till you have made restitution to him. If in business, by petty pilferings, or deceptions, you have dishonestly profited to the injury of another, set it right. You cannot expect to have peace in your conscience till you have, to the utmost of your power, rectified the wrong. As to the Lord himself, if you have robbed him, attend to that business. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse." Support his cause. Pay your fair proportion of the expenses of his house, and do not withhold that which is due.

Above all things, *behold the great Maker of restitution.* There is one who said, "I restored that which I took not away." The Lord Jesus alone can put away the guilt of your robberies of God. He gave himself to remove sin; yea, he gave himself up to the stroke of the sword of justice that sinners might not perish. He died between two thieves; for there are many robbers of God in the land. The justice of God is appeased for your robberies by the death of Jesus. Look to God without fear! Look to him, and be saved. He is willing freely to forgive all your trespasses for Jesus' sake. Only trust him: only trust him now, and he will set you at liberty from the curse which follows all who rob God. Believing, thy sin is gone.

"Sunk as in a shoreless flood,
Drowned in the Redeemer's blood."

Lastly, if thou be saved, say in thy soul, "The past is forgiven, and my fearful robberies of God are pardoned; therefore *I will rob him no more.* By God's help, it shall be my delight to spend and be spent for him, and

"If I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great,
That I would give him all."

I plead for perfect consecration: anything short of that is robbery of God. To live alone for him who loved you, and gave himself for you, is your debt to God; and anything short of that is robbery of God. Chosen before all worlds, will you not be the Lord's? Adopted into the family of grace, will you not serve your heavenly Father? Made an heir of God, joint-heir with Jesus Christ, will you not glorify him who has raised you to this dignity? Ordained to everlasting bliss, a crown awaiting your brow, a palm of victory prepared for your hand, a mansion in glory made ready for you by your glorious Forerunner; will you not glorify your God? Need I plead with you? Nay, I will not; but as you love Christ, who has loved you, I beseech you, present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God, which is your reasonable service. Be not so unreasonable as to refuse your life, your all, for his dear sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Malachi ii. 17; iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—907, 605, 576.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PEACE OF THE DEVIL, AND THE PEACE OF GOD.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 3RD, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace."—Luke xi. 21.

"The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."—Psalm xxix. 11.

PEACE is a condition of things greatly to be desired. To dread no outward disturbance, and to feel no inward storm—who does not desire such a state? Peace has been called a pearl; and rightly, for it is precious, and smiles with soft, mild radiance, bedecking the heart that wears it. It is, indeed, a pearl of great price: he that hath it hath more than riches. If his peace be, in very deed, the true pearl, he who wears it in his breast is one of the favoured sons of God. There may be some few people in the world who love not peace; but we love not their spirit. Certain stormy natures delight in tempest, and, like sea-birds, ride on the crests of raging billows. Men of the Byron type are restless, and an atmosphere of peace suits them not. Their spirits, like thunderbolts, rush onward, finding pleasure in the crash with which they force their wilful way. I need not go out of my way for such; for in vain we speak to those who will not hear. The most of us were cast in another mould. We are not ravens, and cannot remain for ever on the wing; but, like the dove of Noah, we seek rest for the sole of our foot, and we fly hither and thither until we find the olive leaf of peace. How often, amid the disturbances of this troubled world, have we cried, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest"! We were not reared, like eaglets, on stern crags, among the callow lightnings; we listen to the turtle's voice, and love the brooks that warble music as they flow. I know that many of you sigh for rest: you labour that you may enter into it. If you have found the rest which Jesus gives, your heart is sure to sing—

> "For ever here my rest shall be
> Close to thy bleeding side:
> This all my hope, and all my plea—
> For me the Saviour died."

Peace and rest are two names for a flower which buds on earth, but is only found full-blown in heaven; yet even the faint perfume of the

unopened blossom excites our strong desire. Gently doth the Saviour attract us to himself by that sweet call: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Every precious thing in this world is sure to be counterfeited. If the government mint issues gold and silver money, rogues will be found to make spurious coin. The more a thing is cried up, the more is there need of caution that you are not taken in with base imitations of it. Satan is the cunning ape of God; and whatever God does, he tries to do the like with his enchantments. Hence, while there is a peace more precious than the gold of Ophir, there is another peace which is worse than worthless. When a soul is borne up upon the waters of false peace, its case is hopeless till that peace is dried up, and the soul is stranded in self-despair. I thought this morning I might do you some service if I tried to set forth the two peaces, the peace of the devil, and the peace of God. May God the Holy Spirit give discerning hearts to all of you, that you may not be deceived by the poisonous imitation of the waters of peace! May you discern the counterfeit, and reject it with indignation; and may you find the true peace at the feet of the Prince of peace! Oh, for "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding"!

For my part, I should dread to give peace to anyone, upon any subject, at the expense of truth. A temporary hope is ill purchased at the cost of cruel disappointment. A poor woman was the loving mother of an only son. He was very dear to her. He fell sick; indeed, he was sick unto death; but the mother could not bear to think so. She scraped together the needful fee for a physician; and, oh, the peace of heart she had when the trusted man came downstairs, and said to her, "Your son will recover. There is no grave cause to fear. Nurse him carefully, and very soon he will be at his post again"! The mother was restful of heart, for she believed the doctor. Within a single day her son died, and those hours of false peace were the wormwood and the gall of her affliction. It was a sad, sad pity to have raised her hopes; for she cried, "Oh, if I had known that he was going to die, I should not then so bitterly have felt his loss; but I am grievously disappointed. How could the doctor tell me he would live?" The physician was either greatly mistaken, or else wished to soothe the mother's manifest anguish. If the latter was the case, his untruthfulness was unwisdom. I cannot follow the like course. It is a pity to create a peace which is baseless. It is lamentable to me that anyone of you should be slumbering in peace when a great danger is nigh which will cause that peace to vanish as a dream when one awaketh. Avoid that peace which will prove deceptive in the present and ruinous in the future; but long for that which will keep your heart and mind to-day and for ever.

Follow me, I pray you, while I speak of the two forms of peace set forth in my two texts.

I. First, there is THE DEVIL'S PEACE. The foul spirit keeps things quiet in the heart over which he rules: "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." The heart of man is not lawfully Satan's palace; but he has made it so by capture. In his pride he loves to dwell in the midst of this captured stronghold, that

he may vaunt himself over the Most High, from whom he has taken the heart of his creature. Satan values a conquered human heart as a palace: he takes pleasure in domineering over the soul which he has forcibly rent away from God. That he may dwell securely, he covers himself with armour, and he keeps constant watch and ward. Hence the house is quiet, for his watchful power puts down every token of mutiny against his tyranny. The Psalmist describes the dreadful peace of the wicked in Psalm seventy-three: "There are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." Everything goes smoothly with the man who is left in this fatal condition: "Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish." Though it would seem that they are really prospering, it is not so: they are set in slippery places, and they will be cast down unto destruction. There is really nothing enviable in the condition of the godless; but everything pitiable. They cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace. What peace can there be to those whose rebellions are so many? Satan makes conscience lie still, that his power may be confirmed over the heart of the ungodly. I may be speaking to some here who are in good health, have a fair trade, and enjoy credit with their neighbours, and hence they have an earthly peace, and care nothing about being at peace with God. My design shall be to disturb that peace; for if it be the peace of the devil, the sooner it is broken the better for the soul.

This peace is often merely outward. Men put on the air of peace when they do not feel it in their hearts. You will often meet with irreligious men, who tell you that they are perfectly happy, and then ask—What do they want with Christ? They feel themselves all right: what need have they of a new birth? They are getting on so well without God's blessing that they do not care to seek it. Their laughter is loud, their jests are endless, their cares sit lightly upon them. They appear to have no anxiety for the faults of the past, the temptations of the present, or the recompenses of the future; and yet this peace is all external. The crust of ice is hardly strong enough to bear a fly. Follow them to their beds, and see their fear. Mark them in a thunderstorm, see them at sea in a tempest, and you will find that they are the victims of an awful dread. Some display a peace of sheer bravado. They want to seem happy, and therefore they put on the mask of the merry-andrew. The plough-boy, when he goes through the churchyard, is afraid of ghosts, and therefore whistles to keep his courage up; and so, many who are loaded with apprehension try to conceal it by those flippant songs in which they boast of "driving dull care away." In the secret of their soul that same dull care sits on the throne of their hearts, and is not to be driven away by the ballad, and the fiddle, and the dance. Those are often the slaves of misery who figure as the children of mirth. Is it not so with many? When they speak of pleasure, it is from the teeth outward; for there is no Artesian well of joy springing from the depths of their soul. They hold themselves up as the mirror of pleasure, while their heart is breaking with unutterable pain.

In all who have not come to Christ and found peace through his

precious blood, *their peace is false.* Let them say what they will of it, it has no foundation or justification. They have no peace with God, for it is written, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." The great God is the high contracting party with whom the peace must be made; and if he disowns it, in vain will a man pretend to possess it. A sinner may say, "I am at peace as to God"; but if this comes of forgetting or ignoring him, it is a sorry sham. If a man has to forget God before he has peace, that fact betrays a fatal secret. If the man, on remembering God, is troubled, then his peace is a mere writing on the sand. Such peace is false peace; and what true man will solace himself with that which is false? Better know that we are at war, if it be so, than dote upon a peace which is a fool's paradise, and only exists in fancy. I had rather be wounded in a thousand spiritual conflicts than be soothed into eternal destruction by a false peace. Let my hopes be slain by the sword of truth rather than nourished on the bread of lies. God forgive that we should prophesy smooth things for ourselves, while the pen of justice is signing our death-warrant! One prayer I often pray: "Lord, let me know the worst of my case"; and though there is no great pleasure in such a petition, I would suggest that all of you should offer it. It can do you no harm. Pray with the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." See to it that ye be not liars unto your own souls.

To many *this peace comes through ignorance.* They do not know those terrible truths which would make peace impossible. They know not that sin is a deadly viper, and therefore they toy with it as with a bird. They are scarcely conscious that they have committed any sin worth mentioning; but if the light of God's law were turned upon them, they would see that they are guilty before God, and exceeding vile. They are not innocent, as they suppose, but guilty before the living God. Let the Holy Spirit work in a man a sense of sin and an expectation of judgment to come, and I warrant you he will have no more peace till he has fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel. If any of you are wrapt up in a peace woven in the loom of ignorance, I pray God it may be torn to shreds. "But," cries one, "Where ignorance is peace, 'tis folly to be wise." Nay, nay; but where peace is founded on ignorance, it is folly begetting folly. Oh, be wise, and drink not the fool's cordial! Know your true condition, even though that knowledge may cost you present loss of rest. To keep men ignorant is one of Satan's devices, because they are then easier to govern; hence he dreads that you should go where the gospel is preached. If any of you are under Satan's dominion, you are here this morning against your tyrant's wishes. If he could have his way you would never come within ear-shot of God's Word. Even now he will try to make you feel drowsy and inattentive, lest the arousing gospel should awaken you. O my hearers, shun the ignorance which fosters false peace, and the false peace which would make you content without the knowledge of God! The devil greatly rejoices, because in these days so many ministers do not preach the gospel: Satan is glad if he can poison the stream at the fountain-head;

he rejoices if he can make the preacher of the gospel a mere moral essayist, or a talker of his own inventions; for then those who go to hear him will be in no danger of being driven by trouble of mind to fly to Christ. I pray you, if you are wrapt in a peace that will not bear the light of day, bestir yourselves, and escape from your perilous condition.

With many, however, it is not so much ignorance as *thoughtlessness*. Multitudes of persons know, if they would know; but they make no use of their knowledge, for they never think. What a pity to perish for ever from want of consideration! A man has a letter given to him: he puts it in his pocket, and does not open it. He goes out to-morrow for his day's pleasuring, and he promises himself that he will open the letter on Tuesday, when the Bank Holiday is over. Suppose in that letter there should be a warning of some plot against his life, or information of his mother being at the point of death, or of the sudden illness of a favourite child. What will he say to himself if he opens that letter too late? The Bible is to many a man God's unopened letter. Alas, how little do men search the Scriptures! If they do read them, they do it mechanically, and do not think over their warnings. Why will not men think? Thoughtlessness is one of Satan's great nets, in which he entangles many. If the devil can keep you from thinking, he will keep you from believing. If he can keep you in the giddy whirl of vicious pleasure, or even of idle levity, he can make sure of you. Possibly he can effect his purpose by getting you absorbed in politics, or parish matters, or science, or business. Little does he care which, so long as he can draw you off from thinking of God, and of your soul, and of eternal things. Oh, that I could draw a mighty bow and shoot some piercing shaft which would go over the wall and carry death to that traitor, False-peace! How gladly would I blow a blast most loud, and dread to break the spell of the father of lies, and bring you from under his fatal fascination!

This peace, in many cases, is also *the result of carnal security*. Men say, "Well, well; we have not been much troubled yet, and why should we care? We have lived in sin, and we have not suffered for it; in fact, we have prospered through our contempt of scruples." Of old, men said, "Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were"; and to-day they cry, "No deluge of fire has broken out upon us. These Christians say that the earth and all the works of men will be burned up, and the very elements will melt with fervent heat; but we see no likelihood of it. In the heavens there is no sign of the Son of man, no cloud, no great white throne, no token of the judgment. Everything goes on calmly enough—why need we disturb ourselves?" Thus, like the sluggard in the Proverbs, they ask for a little more slumber. They are willingly ignorant, that once upon a time, in the olden days, it was so upon this earth; and men married, and were given in marriage, and ate, and drank, and were drunken; but as it was told them, so it happened; for the flood came, and swept them all away. "When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them." Beware, O men of this generation, lest this happen unto you also, and the deluge of fire be upon you before you have escaped to Christ, who alone is the ark of souls! Will things

always be as they have been? Can you be sure of it? Are you not warned that it will not be so? Your eye is not so clear as once it was; your limbs are not so vigorous as once they were. If there be no change in the world, there is a great change in you during the last few years. Before to-morrow's sun has risen you may lie upon the bed of death. Therefore, I pray you, set it not to your seal that you have much goods laid up for many years; for this night your soul may be required of you. In a moment shall you be troubled: the avenger shall leap through the window, though you think you have made fast the door; and you shall not escape. O sirs, shall not my voice disturb your wicked slumbers, or must you sleep on till the trumpet shall awaken you, not to hope, but to condemnation? Soon shall he come who now would save you, but then must condemn you to the place of everlasting banishment. O Lord, have mercy upon those who are bewitched by carnal security! Break the enchantments of the deceiver.

Some, again, have *a peace that comes of superstition.* "Well," say they, "we know that this is true which has been spoken, but it does not bear upon us. We are all right: we were made members of Christ, and children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven in our infant baptism: we have been confirmed, and we have partaken of the holy communion, and have attended our church, or we have gone to our meeting-house with much regularity. Therefore we feel that for us there is a sure hope." O souls, beware of saying, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these." Joab, in the day when Solomon executed the vengeance of God against him, instead of confessing his fault, and seeking mercy, hoped for safety in the sanctuary, and therefore stood with his hands upon the horns of the altar. The tidings came to the king, "He is by the altar"; but the stern sentence was given, "Fall upon him, and bury him"; and so he perished in the holy place where God's sacrifice was wont to be offered. So will you die if you do not trust in the Lord Jesus, even though your hand should lie upon your baptism and your Lord's supper. No outward performance can enable you to dispense with inward repentance and faith. If your heart be not right with God you shall perish with the sacramental bread in your mouth, and go from the baptismal waters to the fires of hell. Beware of the peace which is drawn from the stagnant pool of superstition: it will carry death into your soul.

Alas! there is a peace which does not lie in believing too much, but in believing too little. *Unbelief brings false peace to thousands.* If Satan can persuade you that, after all, these things are not so; if he can lead you to disbelieve your Bible; if he can lead you to think that there is no God, or that, if there be a God, he takes no account of men, and will never call them to judgment; then the arch-deceiver will make sure of you, and keep his goods in peace. I charge you, beware of that peace which is founded upon the denial of those truths which your own conscience teaches you. Sin must be punished, and if your peace is built upon the supposition that it will not be so, your foundation is even less to be depended upon than the sand. Hazard not your soul upon a lie.

I fear that many are kept in peace through *companionship.* Hand

joins in hand: the man would be troubled, but he meets his old friend, who is a sceptic, and he laughs his fears out of him. The woman gets home, and talks with what she calls "her friends," who are as godless as herself, and she is by their tattle confirmed in her carelessness. O sirs, your friends cannot deliver you if you lose your souls through their means. Choose rather as friends those who roughly tell you solemn truths, than those who with excess of sweetness would flatter you to your everlasting undoing.

Once more, dear friends, I say this—and may God make it come with power to some—*peace caused by the devil is often the awful prelude of the last tremendous storm.* One who described to me the earthquake in the south of France, said, "That morning when we rose, I never saw more lovely weather. Everything smiled deliciously across the blue Mediterranean, and the azure sky was without a cloud. Suddenly, without a moment's warning, a tremor seized the earth, and there was a great cry of men and women in their fright." It usually happens, before tremendous convulsions of nature, that there is an ominous calm. You must have noticed, a few minutes before a storm, how awfully still everything becomes. The air is motionless, the birds sit mute upon the bough, not a leaf is stirring, all is silent expectation. Deceive not yourself; with wings of flame the tempest is hurrying on, and while you speak it bursts upon you, casting all things into confusion and amazement. Before the last dread hurricane of doom a soul may be asleep, and all around it there may be a deep calm. Beware of the treacherous peace! Beware of insensibility! Your unfeeling state should warn you that you are given over to destruction. In the higher and colder latitudes, when men feel a sleepiness stealing over them, their companions stir them up, and rub them, and will not let them slumber; for to sleep is to wake no more. The man pleads, "Let me sleep a half-an-hour, and I shall be so refreshed." Alas! if he sleeps he shall do ill, for he will grow rigid in the death which frost brings to one. Go on, wise friends, and compassionately shake him! Hurry him to and fro; or rub him vigorously till he grows sore. I cannot get hold of you at this present hour with my hands, nor would I wish to give you a bodily shaking; but, oh, that I could do this spiritually, and wake you up! I cannot leave you to sleep your soul into perdition. Come, woman, you must bestir yourself, you must quit this fatal stupor, this deadly peace; for else you will pass away from the world of hope, and wake up in the dungeon of despair. I have now spoken as much as I think wise upon this terrible subject: may the Holy Spirit bless it to you all! It is not my speaking, it is your thinking which is now needed. The Lord move you to holy thought!

II. Now we come to the second part of our discourse, upon which we hope to speak with far greater pleasure. The Psalmist says, "The Lord will bless his people with peace." Here we have THE LORD'S PEACE. I trust numbers of you are now enjoying it. A man of God lay dying, but he was very calm; yea, more—he was supremely happy. He filled the house with cheerfulness. All who came to see him, knowing that he was about to die, as he well knew himself, went away edified and comforted by the interview with this thrice-happy man. One said to him, "Friend, how is it that you have such

peace?" He answered, "I can see no ground or cause for it save this: it is written, 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.'" Was not that a satisfactory reply? There is a weight of argument in it. If your mind is stayed on God, he will keep you in perfect peace. You could not keep yourself in perfect peace in the hour of tribulation, or faintness, or decay; but the Lord can keep you. When heart and flesh fail, God will be your exceeding joy. Then shall you receive Christ's legacy—"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." I love that text, because of the double view it gives of the Peace-maker. Here is a dying Saviour making his will, and saying, "Peace I leave with you." Here is the living Saviour stretching out his hand and saying, "My peace I give unto you." He has not only left it in his will, but he has given it with his hand.

Now, beloved, the peace that we should desire to possess is first of all, *a peace which is a blessing:* "The Lord will bless his people with peace." False peace is a curse; but to be soundly at peace with God is an unalloyed blessing, and it bringeth no sorrow with it. To fall back upon the Father's bosom, and say, "I know that he himself loves me, and I know that I love him"; to look up to Jesus, and to say, "He loved me, and gave himself for me"; to feel the movings of the Holy Spirit, and to yield ourselves up to his influences—this is peace unspeakable. To have no quarrel with God, nay, to have no difference between his will and your own—this is a delightful experience. Men may hate me, but if my God loves me, what does it matter? I may feel the cut of sharp, ungenerous words, but if my God speaketh peace unto me, who can make trouble? "He will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints." This is joy indeed! Do you know it?

It is not only a blessing in itself, but it is a blessing in its consequences. There is no man so humble as the man that is at perfect peace with God: he wonders at the blessing he enjoys. There is no man so grateful; there is no man so courageous; there is no man so little affected by the world; there is no man who bears suffering so patiently; there is no man who is so ready for heaven as the man who is at perfect peace with God, and knows it. The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, is a sacred guard to the soul; it shall keep our hearts and minds by Jesus Christ. The value of peace as keeping the heart and mind is exceeding great. It wards off all sorts of evils, and preserves us unto the day of the Lord's appearing. The more you enjoy peace with God the better. False peace is as stupefying and deadly as opium. Even the smallest drop of this sleeping mixture may be mischievous to the spirit; but you may soon imbibe so much of this false confidence that it may deaden the conscience, and create a fatal hardness of heart. But of God's own peace you may drink to the full, and no harm will come of it. You may be as happy in the Lord as possible, and be all the better for it. Get strong faith, and even full assurance, and it will never make you idle—it will be a blessing, and only a blessing to you all your days. "The Lord will *bless* his people with peace."

Note, next, that *this peace only comes from God;* "*The Lord* will

bless his people with peace." You cannot get that peace apart from the Lord himself: it is of no use to try to work it out of yourself. You say, "I will get better; I will keep the law; I will do this, and do that": you will never dig peace out of the soil of your own works. You cannot spin peace out of your own bowels, as a spider spins her web. You must go to the Lord for peace, and there is only one way in which you can go to him: Jesus says, "I am the way." Go to the Father through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Trust the Father, rest in Christ, yield to the Holy Spirit, and you shall have the peace that God gives. O dear hearers, if you could come and talk with me, and I could comfort you, it might be of no use to you. If you could go to some full-fledged priest, and he could absolve you, it might only be one of the darkest of delusions. But if you go to God, and get his peace, that peace is solid and abiding: it is founded on eternal truth; it is guaranteed by the God of holiness; it is judged to be sound by the Judge of all the earth. Here we have peace from lips that cannot lie, peace from a heart which cannot change, peace through the blood which has made a full atonement. I pray you, seek this peace, and make sure of it. You see how spiritual it is; for you must come to God for it, and you can only come to him in spirit and in truth. You see how little it depends upon externals, upon chapel-going, or church-going: it is by a spiritual approach to God that this blessing can be obtained. Come to the Lord and Giver of peace. Come to Jesus, who is our peace. Oh, may the Divine Spirit lead you to come to Jesus now, at this moment; for in coming to him you shall receive rest! Plead now this promise—"The Lord will bless his people with peace."

This peace comes only to his own people: "The Lord will bless *his people* with peace." He will never bless those with peace who remain in rebellion against him. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Say, are you one of his people? Are you loyal to the Prince Emmanuel? If so, the Lord has bought you with his precious blood, and you are his. The Lord will bless his blood-bought people, and cause them to be his by power as well as by price. Do you rest in Christ alone? Is the atoning sacrifice your soul's great hope? If so, you have been begotten again unto that lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and the Lord will bless with peace his people, who have risen with his own dear Son. If you have the faith of God's elect, you are one of his elect. If you have done with self, the world, and sin, as the main desire of your heart, you are among his people. If you yield yourself to God to live unto him, then you are one of his people, and the Lord will bless you with peace. The more closely you cling to the Lord Jesus, the more clear and full will your peace be.

Do you belong to him so that he can call you one of his people? "Well," says one, "I belong to the church." That is a secondary matter. Many are in the visible church who do not belong to God. "Oh, but I belong to such and such a place of worship, well known for spiritual life." So you may, and yet not be one of the Lord's people; for tares grow among the best of the wheat. Say, O heart, dost thou trust alone to Jesus the Saviour? Hast thou given thyself over to the

Lord to be thine own no longer? Art thou affianced unto Christ—thine all to be his, and thyself to be his bride? Then the Lord will bless thee with abundance of peace. Here is a practical statement, see if it be not true.

Notice, again, that this is *peace in the time of tempest*, and peace after storm. Read over again this twenty-ninth Psalm: it is the Psalm of the thunder-storm. Hear how the voice of God thunders through it from end to end. The great cedars of Lebanon are riven; the mountains are moved, the wilderness of Kadesh is shaken, and the trembling hinds drop their young in their fright. The whole earth rocks beneath the tremendous voice, and is lit up with flames of the lightning of the Lord. Yet the Psalm ends with these gracious words—"The Lord will bless his people with peace." Some of us enjoy our greatest peace when the Lord is abroad, and the thunders roll like drums in the march of the God of armies. We feel a rapture as we perceive that our Father is very near, and is speaking so that we hear his voice. In spiritual storms that voice is our comfort; and after the tempests are over, the Lord speaks a sweet hush to the hearts of his children. He allays our fears, while he whispers, "It is I; be not afraid." Brethren, you will have many a tempest between here and heaven; but before the tempest, through the tempest, and after the tempest, "The Lord will bless his people with peace."

As I turned my text over last night, it seemed to me to be a very wonderful passage. It is a sort of revolving text, like a gun which is always loaded, and may be perpetually discharged. It is a flowing fountain, ever beginning with fresh streams. "The Lord will bless his people with peace." We have had peace with God these forty years; yes, but we have a promise of peace for to-day. Suppose we should live another forty years, we shall still have the same promise —"The Lord will bless his people with peace." I should like an everlasting cheque from some millionaire, running thus: "So often as this cheque is presented at the bank, pay the bearer what he asks." Few persons possessed of such a document would fail to put in an appearance at the bank. We should be regular visitors. O ye children of God, you have such a promissory note in the text before you! The Lord hath endless, boundless peace within himself, and when you have long enjoyed peace with him you may go to him again and say, "Lord, renew my peace. I am troubled, but thou art unmoved: bless me with thy peace." When you are rich, and find that riches bring cares, bring these to your God, who will bless his people with peace. When you are poor, do the same. When children are born to you, and with them come family cares, take the new burden to the Lord, for he giveth peace. And if the children die, and you weep as your young shoots are cut off, still turn to the Lord, and believe that he will bless you with peace. If you grow sick yourself, and the tokens of a deadly disease appear upon you, still be calm, for he will bless you with peace. When you must go upstairs and lie down upon your last bed to rise no more, then, even then, the Lord will bless you with his ever-living peace; and when you wake up at the sound of the last trump the Lord will still keep you in perfect peace. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." Ever is

this the heritage of his believing ones: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Whatsoever shall befall our race according to the dark page of prophecy, whatever of terror shall break forth throughout the endless ages of the yet-to-be, the Lord will bless his people with peace. Take this truth home to your heart, and live upon it, and you may dwell perpetually in the presence of the King.

I have done when I have said the following words. First, let us enquire whether we are resting on a false or a true foundation. Am I addressing a stranger to this Tabernacle, here to-day for the first time? I would not wish to do you anything but real good, and yet I should like to search you to the foundation. Is your hope built on a false peace? then I would like to overthrow it, and leave no stone upon another. Refuges of lies must be swept away before refuges of grace will be sought. If you take shelter behind "a bowing wall and a tottering fence," I would desire to lend a hand towards sending it over; for over it will go before long, and it had better go while you can seek another shelter. You will never be on a right foundation until you are off the wrong one. As long as your happiness and peace are false, and yet are fair to look upon, you will not seek true peace; therefore, I would break the idols to shivers. Will you look to this? Will you give over being too secure? May I ask you to accept nothing as a ground of comfort which is not true? Do not believe in a security which is only of temporary value. Believe eternal truth, and seek eternal life. Do not wrap yourself about with a comfort which you dare not prove and test. If you dare not examine it to the very bottom, away with it. If it will not bear the closest search, leave it to those who can afford to run great risks, for you cannot. If you dare not think about your state, be sure that there is something wrong in it. Walk in the light of God, and have no fellowship with unfruitful hopes, which are works of darkness.

May I entreat you, when you have laid these things to heart, to seek at once to have close dealings with God. Do not say, "I will begin searching the Scriptures." That is a good thing in itself, but if you rest in Scripture-reading, and do not go to God himself, your Bible may be made a stumbling-stone for your soul. Do not say, "I shall attend more religious services." This, also, may be well; but religious services will ruin you if you put them in the place of personal dealings with God. Your living soul has personally to do with the living God. Come to him this morning, if you have never been before. Come at once. Delay no more. Do you shrink? Do you want an introduction? Do you need a friend to go with you to heaven's high court? Behold, the Son of God waits to be your Mediator and Intercessor. Come you to the Father through the Son, and you will in no wise be cast out.

Get a hope, O my hearer, which will last you to the last. Get a hope which you can die with. I charge you by the living God, and by Christ Jesus, who will surely come to judge the quick and dead, get a confidence which will endure the test of death, judgment, and eternity. Seek to have "boldness in the day of judgment." No small matter *this*. Make sure work for the day of trial. How can you be sure unless your trust is built upon the foundation which God himself has laid? Behold

the all-sufficient sacrifice. Rest in the divine expiation, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

"But can we be sure?" cries one. There are thousands of us who possess the assurance of a child-like faith. We could not rest a minute if we were not sure in such a matter. I could not be content with a salvation which did not give me certainty in my soul: for sin is real, and I must have real pardon: my trouble of heart is real, and I must have real confidence in a Saviour: my inward sinfulness is real, and I must have a real new-birth unto holiness. In the day when I took hold of Christ Jesus my Lord, I found in him such real peace that I knew and was persuaded that he is able to save. If any call me a dogmatist, I plead guilty to the charge. I must dogmatize when I am sure. I cannot live without being certain; doubt in this matter is death. I accept my Lord's atonement, I rest on it, and I find peace to my soul. "If," "but," "peradventure"—these are dirks and daggers at my heart. Where is the comfort to any soul in what he does not know to be true? The sap and substance of consolation lie in the certainty of the truth believed. If you are not sure, never rest till you are. Once know assuredly that God is good to Israel, and that he will bless his people with peace, and then go on to enjoy as much of that peace as your soul can hold. Sing both by day and by night. "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice." As for me, I know whom I have believed; and the resolve of my soul is to magnify my Lord, world without end.

"Down from above the blessèd Dove
Is come into my breast,
To witness thine eternal love,
And give my spirit rest.

"My God, I'll praise thee while I live,
And praise thee when I die,
And praise thee when I rise again,
And to eternity."

Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms lxxiii., xxix.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—734, 715, 726.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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CHRIST'S TESTIMONY RECEIVED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 10TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true."—John iii. 33.

IN opening this discourse, I would call your attention to the different statistics given by John's disciples, and by John himself. In the twenty-sixth verse, the disciples say, "All men come to him": that is their judgment of how the ministry of Jesus was succeeding. John, in the thirty-second verse, said, "And no man receiveth his testimony." If we view them as both correct, then the disciples looked at outward appearances; and in that view the cause of Jesus seemed to be prospering to an overwhelming degree: "All men come to him." But John looked below the surface, at the true spiritual results; and his verdict was, "And no man receiveth his testimony." Be very doubtful of statistics: they depend very much upon the person compiling them. Some, with sanguine spirit, say everything that is delightful and encouraging; others, with more serious, and with perhaps more severe judgment, say much that is depressing.

I am inclined to take both these opinions with a grain of salt; each one was intended for truth, but neither of them was exact. We often hear persons say that there are crowds attending such a ministry, the people block up the gangways, they fill every seat, and the preacher is very useful, for "all men come to him." This may be true; and yet there may be few conversions, and little spiritual result; so that another may as truly say, "No man receiveth his testimony." Ah, dear friends, we can never be satisfied with a numerous congregation; we want souls to receive the testimony of Christ! Even though we may thank God that all sorts and conditions of men lend willing ears to our teaching, yet one note sounds the knell of our joy: if we hear it said, "No man receiveth his testimony," we are sad at heart.

Forgetting what the disciples reported, let us now look at what John said, "No man receiveth his testimony." He did not mean literally that no one received the truth, for his next word was, "He that hath received his testimony." He meant that *comparatively*

none received it. Compared with the crowds who came to him, compared with the nation of Israel, compared with the human race, those who received Christ's testimony were so few that his sadness made him call them none. John, though he went a little below the mark, was not far from the truth when he said, "No man receiveth his testimony." In these profound and wordy days this is called the "pessimist" view of things. However, if it was not precisely the truth, it was mournfully near it. To-day, Christ is preached, and many will come to hear about him; but, alas, few receive the gospel into their hearts! Go through these crowded streets, and mark how few receive the sacred testimony. Go into our provincial towns and country villages, and note how few receive the truth as it is in Jesus. When you look at the denominational rolls at the end of the year, what small additions have been made! I think one section of the church reports one addition for the year. If any community reports as high as three or four per cent., people think wonders are accomplished. The world can never be converted at the rate at which we are now going on, for the increase of population is greater than the increase of the churches. We are relatively further back than we were. There are more Christians; but there are fewer Christians in proportion to the population. There is much reason for crying earnestly to God to work more mightily upon the hearts of men.

How glad was John to think that some had received Christ's testimony! How hungry he was that there should be more! In what earnest tones does he set forth his Lord's claims in the verses around our text! He would have men go beyond himself, and find Christ, and receive his testimony.

This is how the case stands. Men had wandered far from God; God desired that men should come back to him; and therefore he sent a witness to men to tell them of his kindly feelings towards them, and to show in his own person, teaching, life, and death how really and truly God desired that men should be at peace with him. The only-begotten Son was born into our world, and took our nature, that he might be a witness to the people of the character of God towards us; that we, knowing how God felt, might be led to cry, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord." He would have us touched with tender relentings when we discover the greatness of the love and mercy of God towards us, by seeing him seeking and saving the lost in the person of his only-begotten Son.

Of that subject I am going to speak this morning, keeping as closely as I can to the text, and crying to the Holy Spirit for aid.

First, *observe the testifier* carefully. Look at him, and see who it is that has come to reveal the Father unto us. Secondly, *hearken to his testimony*. What is it? Know it, and believe it. Thirdly, *note the rejecters:* "No man receiveth his testimony." How sad is the fact! Then, coming closer still to the text, *commune with those who do receive his heaven-given testimony*. Of these it is said that they have set to their seal that God is true.

I. First, let us OBSERVE THE TESTIFIER. Jesus, our Lord, as a witness, is so wrapped up with the testimony which he bears, that you have to know him before you can understand his witness: in fact, to

receive *him* is the same thing as to receive his testimony. If we have received Christ as what he is, we have received the testimony which he came to bear.

Who is this testifier? this witness? We answer that, according to the context, it is "*he that cometh from above.*" To save us, there has not come to us a man whose origin was at his birth, but one who existed long before, and descended from above. It is true that Jesus was born at Bethlehem; but it is equally true that he had a pre-existence from before all worlds. The Word was from the beginning with God; "without him was not anything made that was made." He was God as truly before he became man as ever he was afterwards. He that has come to save us has, in the highest sense, come from above. Let this kindle hope in the sinner's mind, and let it draw forth faith in the divine ambassador. One has come from the highest heavens to lift those up, who, apart from him, must have sunk into the lowest hell. Nearly nineteen hundred years have passed since he came and trod the roughest ways of this world, and lived, and sorrowed, and suffered here below. From the hills of heaven he came to this land of sin, that he might lift us up, and give us a divine inheritance.

He was one of the very highest character. Observe: "He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all." All other messengers that God has sent have had much earthliness about them; and, assuredly, we who are now his messengers, have much of it. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels;" but there was nothing in our Lord Jesus that could debase the messenger. He was pure, perfect, heavenly; and though he bore our nature, yet he shared not our sinfulness; and though he spoke in our tongue, and brought down the mysteries of heaven to our comprehension, yet still he spoke them in a heavenly style—a style to which a mere man could never have reached. Moses wrote as a man, and the Spirit of God only revealed truth measurably by him; but our Lord Jesus Christ was full of grace and truth, and he spoke with a manhood united to Godhead, having the Spirit without measure. In all Jesus said there was a fulness, a power, a reality, which mere men were not capable of containing. He was above all; and others derived their authority from him, "for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Will you not listen to one so supreme? "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son;" surely it shall go ill with him that refuseth such a messenger.

As he was above all in character, *so was he above all in rank.* None can be compared with him for dignity: the angels may be peers of the heavenly realm, but he is the Crown Prince, of the Blood-royal of eternity. He is God over all, before whom cherubim and seraphim veil their faces. He deigned to become subject to parents, but he was, none the less, above all, Lord, Ruler, Head over all things. Though he stooped to seek and save the lost, he was still higher than the highest: though he laid his glory by, that he might wash his disciples' feet; yea, and wash our sins away in his own blood; yet

he was still Master and Lord. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven." I cannot too highly speak of the glory and honour and majesty which belong to our Emmanuel. If I had the tongues of men and of angels, I could not sufficiently extol him. He is the First-born of every creature, yea, the Creator himself. King of kings, and Lord of lords is he; and it is through so glorious a person as this that God hath sent to us a message of peace. Our ambassador is of a rank above all ranks, that the Lord may show how highly he esteems his chosen of the race of man. We are greatly honoured by dealing with so august a messenger. Come, ye willing hearts, and gladly receive the testimony of him who is above all!

We are further told by John a very important fact, which ought to weigh with every thoughtful mind. *The testimony of Jesus is personal testimony*: "what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth." The prophets received their prophecies from the Holy Spirit, who spake to them of things which they had not seen. Sometimes they did not even understand what they wrote; they did not see those things of which they wrote, for it is written that "many prophets and kings have desired to see those things, but have not seen them." These things even angels desired to look into, but they were too mysterious for them. Our Lord Jesus Christ knows heavenly things of his own proper knowledge, for he has ever dwelt in the bosom of the Father. He knows the mind of God, for he is God. The secret intent and purpose of the Most High God are with his Son Jesus. All that he reveals to men of the mercy of God he has himself seen and heard. He was an eye and ear witness of the mind and will of Jehovah. Christ's teaching is not second-hand: "No man knoweth the Father, save the Son." Who taught him wisdom? Whence hath this Man knowledge? From his own self, from his own eternal experience, as dwelling with God before all worlds, he speaks to us. Do you want a better messenger, my hearers? How can the Lord serve you better than by sending one who knows what he declares—knows it by having heard, and seen, and handled it? With the God who made the heavens and fashioned the earth he ever dwelt, as one brought up with him, and he was daily his delight. The Lord God has sent as ambassador to you one whom he "possessed in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." What more can you desire?

And then, further, the Baptist goes on to tell us that *the testimony of Jesus is identical with the words of God himself.* "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that *Christ* is true." Do you see, I am reading amiss? The Scripture saith, "that *God* is true." The testimony of Jesus and the testimony of God are one; and when you believe Christ Jesus, you believe God. Further on we read, "for he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." If you deny what Christ says, you make God a liar; for you have not believed his testimony concerning his Son. So fully is the witness of Jesus backed up and supported by the words of God, so fully does Jesus represent the purpose and the mind of the Father, that to doubt him is to doubt

the Eternal God. Now, if you have a plan of salvation put before you by God's messenger—which is most assuredly the very mind of God himself—will you reject it? Will you fly in the face of God by rejecting salvation, which comes stamped in every letter of it with divine authority? I pray you, my hearers, if you have not yet believed in Jesus, remain no longer in unbelief of him, for it is unbelief of the Lord God, unbelief of the Triune Jehovah, who made you, and who keeps the breath in your nostrils. See what a messenger we have, then, who speaks not his own words, but the words of him that sent him. Those words are full of grace and truth; for they are full of God.

Read a little further on, in the next verse, and you will see that this messenger whom God hath sent is *one in high esteem with God.* "The Father loveth the Son." To show his great love of him, he "hath given all things into his hand." You have not now to deal with God out of Christ, for all things are now put under the mediatorial government of the Son of God. Christ Jesus, the Mediator between God and men, hath all things in his power: the government is upon his shoulder. It has pleased the Father to put all things under the man Christ Jesus:

> "Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown
> Hang on his sacred will."

Jesus is absolute Master of all things; angels fly, and devils tremble, at his nod, and all the wheels of Providence revolve in perfect order according to his will. If you listen to his testimony of grace, remember that he has all power to back it up, and make it true to you. "He is able to save to the uttermost." All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth. God hath put all things under his feet: and he who is thus the Lord of all, has come to treat with you concerning reconciliation. Turn not on your heel, ye busy men; say not that you have no time to attend to him! Ye must attend to One whose kingdom ruleth over all. Dare you treat him with indifference? Will not the awe of his majesty constrain you to hearken to his voice?

Once more only. Concerning this testifier, we learn that *he is the Lord and Giver of life,* and if we will but accept his testimony we shall live thereby. He hath life in himself, and he has power to quicken whomsoever he will. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." And, to make the matter still more pressing, the word of warning is added, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." God can never be pleased with a person who gives the lie to his own Son. He has, in boundless pity, sent his Son, his only-begotten Son, to live and die, that men might be saved; how shall he endure to see him rejected? "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And if this Son of his love be refused, if the guilty insult the Father by rejecting the Son, what can remain but righteous wrath? If a deed of mercy, unspeakable, immeasurable, comes to be despised by you, then the anger must abide upon you. There is no hope for those who refuse Jesus. Flatter not yourselves that there is another way of escape, in

some future state; for if there could have been another way, God would not have given up his Son to shame, suffering, and death. Faith in Jesus is the only door of hope; shut that upon yourselves, and you shut yourselves in outer darkness, in helpless, hopeless misery. What can help you if the wrath of God abideth on you? This must mean a misery unspeakable, without the slightest alleviation. O my dear hearers, I wish I had the power to set forth my Lord as the witness! As I cannot do this as I would, I commend to you the passage of Scripture itself. The sentences are short, sharp, crisp, clear, and they show you who he is whom God hath sent on the great errand of divine love. Refuse him not, I implore you.

II. Secondly, HEARKEN TO HIS TESTIMONY. What is the testimony of Jesus? What has the Christ to tell us concerning God? I will only use the three chapters which precede my text, and I shall gather enough from them to give a fair outline of what Jesus tells us of the Father, and his willingness to forgive and save.

First, he tells us, *God has provided an atonement.* Look at the twenty-ninth verse of the first chapter, where John says, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The very fact that the Son of God came here as man to suffer for our sin, proves that God has provided a great and all-sufficient sacrifice. God could not deal with a sinful world, it was too defiled with sin for him to look upon it; but that sin of the world which prevented a holy God from dealing with a condemned race, has been taken away by Jesus, so that now the Lord can visit man, and favour him with the gospel of peace, and the work of salvation. This was needful before a single individual could be saved. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." The death of Jesus has enabled God to treat with men. Oh, hear ye this! There is a sacrifice for sin! My hearers, believe it, and make much if it. The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. Jesus has died; and in that death he has finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. All believers are forgiven through his death. God is willing that you, believing in his dear Son, should be so forgiven as to be washed whiter than snow. That is Christ's testimony to you; and he that receiveth it hath set to his seal that God is true.

The next testimony of Jesus is that *the Lord has made a way of access between man and God.* See you the fifty-first verse of the first chapter. He said to Nathanael, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Jacob's ladder is not now before you as a dream, but as a reality. The Son of man, the Incarnate God, God in Christ Jesus, is the way by which there can be commerce between man and God. We can go up to God, and the angels of God, loaded with blessings, can come down to men. The gulf is bridged: a glorious stairway has been made across the dread abyss which separated guilty man from his offended God. Jesus Christ himself, in his own person, is that ladder, and he bears witness thereof to you. Sin is put away, and distance is removed.

What is the next part of his testimony? You will find it in the third chapter: *God is only to be approached in a spiritual way.* To come

to God, "ye must be born again." That which is born of flesh is flesh, and cannot commune with God, who is a spirit. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and can commune with the holy God, and understand spiritual things. My hearers, there is no coming to God by a priest of human consecration, no coming by outward ritual, form, and ceremony: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." You must have a spiritual nature, that the Spirit of God may commune with you. Only by a spiritual nature can you have intercourse with the great Invisible. Your spirit can be in fellowship with God, the mighty Spirit; but what can you do till a spirit is created in you? This was our Lord's testimony to Nathanael; and I suppose that, by some means, John the Baptist had heard of it; but whether he had or had not does not matter to my purpose at this time; it is certainly a part of the testimony of Jesus.

Furthermore, our Lord bore testimony to the great fact that *God gives salvation to all believers in Jesus*, and to make that very plain, he puts it thus—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." You know the type. Bitten by the fiery serpents, the people looked to the brazen serpent, and they were healed. Now, bitten by sin, you look to him, who was made sin for us; and, looking to him, your guilt passes away, and the poison of your sinfulness meets its antidote. We look to Jesus and live. Our Lord bore witness to this with his own lips, and then by the lips of his apostles. He still cries, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Yes, there is life in a look at the Crucified One. Believing is receiving. Accept Christ, whom God sends as a messenger to you, and in accepting him you shall be saved.

Jesus also testified plainly that *from all who believe in him the Lord has removed condemnation.* It is written, "He that believeth on him is not condemned." He that believeth is justified, and "being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Guilty and condemned as you may be at this hour, if you accept the Son of God to stand for you, you are not condemned. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though by nature robed in rags, the Lord saith, "Take away the filthy garments from him." Your glorious challenge is, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died." Oh! this message of mercy from Jesus, is it not full and blessed? If I had the time, I should like to have enlarged much upon the testimony of God in Christ Jesus; but here it means just this, that you, being guilty and condemned, can be justly forgiven, through the sacrifice of Jesus. You may be beloved of God because of his love to Jesus; and delivered from all the evil results of sin because of the death of the Well-beloved. You can be saved; yea, if you now believe in Christ Jesus, you are saved. All heavenly privileges are yours now, where you now sit, and shall be yours world without end. Glory be to God!

III. With great heaviness we have now to NOTICE THE REJECTERS: —"No man receiveth his testimony." You would have thought that

the moment this testimony was delivered to the world every man would have hastened to hear it, and would have believed it with joyful readiness: but, alas, the very reverse happened! If I went to fish with such bait as this, I should expect to have a sea full of fish rushing towards me; but it was not so. Men, as a rule, will not accept this heavenly salvation: no man will receive it except moved by God the Holy Ghost. Why is this?

In the case of many, *it is because they are earthly;* the message and the messenger are too heavenly for them. They are earth-bound, and earth-buried. They are so busy; how can they consider the grand fact that God has come down to save men? They will think of that great spiritual truth one of these days when they have made sufficient money, and can retire, and have nothing better to do than to attend to the claims of God. God is second-rate, nay, seventh-rate in their esteem. They are really so occupied, and their thoughts are so taken up with daily cares of this life, that God's grace must wait their convenience. I fear they will never be startled into thought until it is said of each one of them, "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." The rich man had kept his eyes downward upon his sumptuous faring, and had never looked up to heavenly things; but the realities of eternity awakened him. O God, grant that none of my hearers may keep their eyes down until they lift them up in hell!

Some rejecters of the Word of our Lord, I have no doubt, were *too learned to believe in anything so simple* as the statement that God was among them in human form, to live and die for men. Though this is in very truth the sublimest of all mysteries, yet human pride counts it a small matter: it is to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Men know so much that they will not know God. I am struck every day, when reviewing books of the present period, with how wise fools are nowadays. Pardon me; I will put it differently, and say—how foolish the wise are nowadays. I mean the same thing, whichever way I say it. They get a hold of the tail of a dead thing, and they shout like men that find great spoil. Here is a great discovery—a discovery of nothing! At one time they find Deuteronomy to be a fraud; next there are two Isaiahs; anon, the book of Ruth was written far down in the centuries after the exile; Jonah is a myth, Esther is a romance, and so forth. Their criticisms are all false, as others of the same breed soon show. They are always finding some dead cat or other, and setting it out on the table, where the children's bread ought to be. What mighty discoveries of mares' nests we have lived to see! Men of this nature will not receive the witness of Jesus: it is a pity that they should: he is honoured by their rejection. You can scarcely read a book nowadays, but you come across a bit of rotten stuff, the fondly-cherished nonsense of some writer who has a taste for that which is far gone in decay. They will not believe God. How can they while they receive honour one of another, as learned critics? It is to-day as it was in our Lord's time, "not many wise men after the flesh are called." Still have we to ask, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?" Those who glory in fleshly wisdom cannot receive the testimony of the carpenter's Son—

a testimony so plain that the poor and illiterate can understand it, and enter into eternal life thereby. I hope this will not be the case with any of the more cultured among you. Be willing to take Christ's yoke upon you, and learn of him.

Certain people did not receive the testimony of Jesus because they were too proud. Pedigree and privilege kept many away. Read this verse in the first chapter:—"He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Why? Because they thought they were God's own already. Did they not wear a text of Scripture between their eyes? Had they not broad fringes of blue to their dress? Did they not tithe mint, and anise, and cummin, and other pennyworths of herbs? Did they not fast thrice in the week, and so on? What did they want with Jesus? Those who professed to belong to God, and cried, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we," were too good to accept a Saviour, too near to heaven to need a messenger from God.

The real reason for rejecting the testimony of Jesus was this—*they were too evil to receive it.* Read verse 19: "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." Ah, my unbelieving hearers, if you were better men, you would more readily accept the light of Christ! If men were not such sinners as they are, they would come to him to learn the way of the Lord. Alas! the depth of man's guilt has hardened his heart, and darkened his perceptions, and made him prefer darkness to light. Men do not see that they need deliverance; they hear music in the rattle of their chains. May the Spirit of God come, and convince men of sin; and when they are once convinced of it, and foresee their doom, they will change their minds towards the Saviour, and be willing to hear the message of divine grace. May God, of his boundless grace, save every man and woman and child to whom this sermon shall come! I am greatly pleased to see so many of you present on such a wet and stormy day as this: I hope the Lord means to bless you now that you are here. I remember going to the house of God one morning when there were only a few persons able to reach the place, there being a heavy snow-storm at the time. That morning I found the Saviour by looking to him upon the cross; and now I look with great interest upon services which are held in rough weather. I hope that those who have had the determination to come are more than common hearers; I trust that they have hearts that the Lord God has touched. I hope you have come hither with a desire to find salvation, and if so, may you find it in the Lord Jesus at once! O Lord, grant it, I beseech thee!

All the while, remember, these rejecters of Christ *were under the wrath of God.* What a terrible condition! I will not dwell upon the awful fact; but let a man only know the meaning of these words, and he will tremble in his seat—"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." O souls, how can you bear it?

IV. We will conclude by speaking upon the fourth point. Let

US COMMUNE WITH THOSE WHO RECEIVE CHRIST'S TESTIMONY. The text says, "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." To receive is, in still plainer Saxon, "*to take in.*" There is here the idea of retaining as well as receiving. We take in the testimony of Jesus that it may abide in us. We hear what Jesus says, and we answer to it, "Lord, I believe." Our word is, "Master, say on. Whatever thou sayest, I believe." We take in all that Jesus witnesses, and we hold to it. We believe, and we keep on believing. We come to Jesus, and we are always coming to him. Some people begin with believing in Jesus, and then turn aside to believe in their own feelings; but you must not do so. You must believe, and keep right on believing. The just shall live by faith. We receive Christ, and keep on receiving him. "He that receiveth his testimony." Do you refuse anything to which Jesus witnesses? This is evil. Receive his testimony with unquestioning faith. Some men will believe any monstrous assertion of scientists, or spiritualists, or rationalists; but they cannot believe the plain witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The man who takes in the teaching of Jesus, and keeps to it, he is the blessed man.

He takes in the testimony of Jesus for himself, and receives it as his own possession. That Jesus saves from sin is true; that he saves *me* from sin is a more personal truth. Christ will save those who believe. This is good. But "I believe, and therefore I am saved," is better. Personal appropriation is the best receiving. Accept the truth of Jesus for your own soul; seize it by the grip of a personal faith, and then you have it. You have seen a boy with a burning-glass—he concentrates all the rays of the sun so as to produce a burning; even so, by faith, concentrate the testimony of Jesus upon your own case, and you will soon feel a wonderful power working in your soul. He that receives the testimony of Jesus makes it his own, feeds on it, and is saved thereby.

Receivers of Christ's testimony allow nothing to make them doubt what he has said. When the believer is down in the dumps, and is passing through a dark time, he says, "What Jesus has said is true for all this. He has told me that, if I believe in him, I have eternal life, and I have it, however gloomy things may appear. I have a sluggish liver, and it makes me feel low and miserable; but I have eternal life. My wife is sickening to death, and I have buried child after child, and lost friend after friend; but I have eternal life. God's waves and billows go over me, but I have eternal life; for he says it, and I cannot doubt him." It is a grand thing to have your confidence outside yourself; it is glorious to have it all in Christ. As long as you keep your confidence in your own self, it will be a very poor stay for you. There is a ship at sea, and a foolish landsman feels very confident of the safety of the vessel because they have a big anchor on board. My dear man, what is the good of that anchor while it is on board? It would rather tend to sink the ship by its weight than to be of service to it. "Oh," says he, "but it is one of the best Admiralty anchors, and we are safe while that is on board!" O simple soul, an anchor is of no use while you can see it! Drop it down into the deep sea, out of sight, and then it will be of service.

Hear the chain run out! Now the anchor is far down, it grips, and holds the vessel. You must fix your confidence within the veil. Your anchorage of hope must be where mortal eyes can never see. Our rest lies in simply believing the word of the Lord Jesus. I believe it, though I do not feel it. I believe it, though I cannot argue the matter out logically. I believe it, because God says it to me through his great witness, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The foregoing will enable you to see the truth of the statement, "He that hath received his testimony *hath set to his seal that God is true.*" In the olden time men did not often write their names, because they could not write at all. Even kings set their seals, because they could not give a signature. To this day, how often does it happen to me, as a trustee to a chapel or a school, to have a paper laid before me, and I not only sign my name, but I put my finger on that red wafer, which represents my seal, and I say, "This is my act and deed"! When you believe in Jesus, you have set your seal to the testimony of Jesus, which is the revelation of the Lord. You have certified that you believe in God as true. What does that mean? It means not only that he has kept his promise as made to the fathers in the Old Testament, and will keep it in Christ Jesus; but it means also, that to you *God is real.* By faith in Jesus you have come to know the reality of God. Before, you talked about an unknown God, but now you know him, and declare your faith in his reality and fidelity. Now you perceive substance, and not shadow. Now you see mystery, but not myth. God is truth, and all that Jesus said of him is truth. He says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life"; and you find that God is true, for you live in newness of life. Jesus says, "He that believeth on him is not condemned"; and you know it is so, for you enjoy a sense of pardoned sin. You have sealed the testimony of God by resting your own soul upon it. It seems a very joyful thing to me that I should be allowed to be a witness to the truth of God. I feel honoured by being allowed to subscribe my name to the testimony of Jesus. Can you not do the same? Remember what it involves. You doubting Christians, what are you doing? You have already put your hand and seal to the promise of God, and are you going to contradict your own signature and seal? When you first believed in Jesus, you set to your seal that God is true; and now, because you have met with a little trouble, are you going to retract your witness? Do you fear that the Lord will not help you, and save you? What are we to understand by that seal of yours? Is God, after all, untrue, or unreal? You know better. Shame on you for contradicting yourself! Remember, when you make God a liar, you make yourself a liar, for you have already set your hand and seal to it that God is true; and seals and handwritings remain. You accepted the real Saviour for your real sin, and you believed in the real death of Christ for you: are you going to run back? Will you doubt your Lord after this? God grant you may not; but, on the contrary, may you go on confirming the testimony of Jesus, and setting it to your seal again and again that God is true! Give glory to God by believing that what he has promised he is able also to perform. Never stagger at the promise through unbelief. All the promises of

God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, to the glory of God by us; wherefore, we set to our seal that God is true.

I have done, when I have said just this. Avoid, dear hearers, anxiously, the double sin of unbelief. If you do not believe Jesus, you do not believe God. If you reject his Son, you reject himself. If you give the lie to the teaching of Christ, you give the lie to God. Flee from this deadly sin.

Note well the simple matter upon which eternal life depends. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." He has it *now;* it is in his heart now; and it is not for a time, for it is everlasting life. Note that, as soon as a man believes God, he sets to his seal that God is true, and then away flies all suspicion of his God. Our sins are largely caused by our mistrust of God. You think that God denies you something that would be good for you, and therefore you go and take it. You suspect God of being so cruel as to command you to do that which is to your injury, and so you refuse to obey him. Now if you believe that God is true, you will henceforth give up what he bids you give up, because you feel that it is well to do so; and you will act as he bids you, because you are sure his command is wise and good. Between you and God there will be henceforth a holy confidence; and what will that lead to? It will lead to holiness of life, and earnest seeking to please God, in whom you unreservedly believe. You will love him with all your heart, and with all your soul, now that confidence is created. See what a change faith makes! Have you never heard of a servant who believed hard things of her mistress? She thought her a tyrant, and resolved that she would do nothing to please her. When she did her work, she did it very badly, and thought it was quite good enough for such a creature as her mistress. But she heard something about her which entirely changed her opinion. Instead of thinking her a demon, she judged her to be little less than an angel. It might have seemed a small matter, but it was not so. She did her work zealously and gladly now that her suspicions were ended. Faith in her mistress affected her whole life. So is it in spiritual things. Faith in Christ Jesus is the fountain of obedience, the ensign of a change of heart. God grant it to you all! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John iii. 13—36.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—909, 249, 531.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE HOLD-FASTS OF FAITH.*

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 17TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Who is the father of us all, (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."—Romans iv. 16, 17.

ABRAHAM had received an assurance from the Lord that he was to be the father of many nations. His faith in this promise underwent great trials. Where there is the sweet honey of promise, there the wasps of doubt will be gathered together. A promise calls for faith; but through our natural depravity, it awakens unbelief; and there is a struggle around the sacred promise, such as that represented in the prayer, "Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief."

Satan, with slimy flattery, decoys men into a belief of his lie; but the God of truth gives us his bare promise, and bids us believe it; and when questions suggest themselves, he does not relax his claim, but bids us still believe. True faith, as the work of God, is not a thing to be put down: it is a conquering grace, and makes a brave fight against wicked unbelief.

While doing so, faith has her eyes open, and she, in due season, spies out grounds of confidence. She looks at God himself; she considers the days of old; she remembers her own experience of the right hand of the Most High; and thus she lifts her eyes to the hills, whence cometh her help. When faith has discovered a helpful truth she makes immediate use of it as a holdfast, even as Abraham did in the case now before us.

The great difficulty with Abraham was *death*. Death was around him on every side. God had promised him life, and life more abundantly; for he was to be the father of many nations, and have a seed as many as the stars of heaven for multitude; but as to all possibility of his being a father, his body was now dead. He was a hundred years old, and withered with age: how could he become a father of nations? Sarah, also, as to being a mother, was practically dead, for she was

* The preacher begs the reader, before perusing the sermon, to read the two portions of Scripture which were used in the public service. They are set down at the end of the sermon.

ninety years old. How should she bear sons unto Abraham? Further on the Lord bade him, when Isaac was miraculously born, to offer him as a sacrifice, and Abraham was willing to do even that at God's command. He believed that in Isaac should his seed be called, and therefore he looked that God should "raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." The patriarch's faith settled down upon *God's power to quicken the dead*, and he found in that unquestioned truth a foundation for the firmest confidence. The truth of God's power to quicken the dead met all the difficulties of Abraham's position. He argued: What if my body be dead? God can quicken it. What if my wife be, in this matter, as one dead? By God's power she can receive strength. What if my son, when growing up, should be dead on the altar? He that made me the promise can raise him up from the dead; for what he has promised he is able to perform. Abraham's faith was a nail fastened in a sure place. He knew Jehovah as "God, who quickeneth the dead"; and that resurrection word was, to his faith, a shout of victory.

Abraham had a second holdfast in *the creating power of God*. The Lord had spoken to him concerning his seed as though it existed, and had said, "I have made thee a father of many nations." As though these nations were already born, he had changed his name from Abram to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude." Yet, when he entered his tent, no child fondly climbed his knee, no babe smiled from the arms of Sarah! "To me thou hast given no seed," was the humble statement of the believing patriarch. He felt that Jehovah could call forth from non-existence a people as many as the stars of heaven, for he had said, "so shall thy seed be." You know what it is to call a servant. You say "Mary," and there she is. You have called one who is, and she appears at your call. But God calls the things that are not as though they were, and lo, they appear at his bidding! He says, "Light be," and light was. He says, "Let there be a firmament," and the blue sky overarches the whole earth. When he calls for fish or fowl, for plant or beast, they answer to the call. So Abraham argues: If God calls for descendants for me, they will come. Though there be no sign of my being a father, and, speaking after the flesh, it is impossible; yet God, who calls everything out of nothing, can call for a numerous progeny for me, and that progeny will come.

Thus, you see, in the hour of trial, Abraham's faith fell back upon the two facts of resurrection and creation, and there it rested in peace.

I desire, at this time, without wisdom of words, in great simplicity, to teach this one lesson. It is a very plain lesson, but if it be well learned, it will be a well of strength and solace to you. God raiseth the dead, and createth out of nothing, and therefore he can carry out the promises of his gospel. Get this worked into your own souls, and you will be strong in faith. Once strong in faith you are strong everywhere, for as a man's faith is, so is he. If your faith shall learn to stay herself upon eternal principles, and find her rest in the omnipotence of God, you will become like Abraham, a prince among men; and this service will bring you a life-long blessing.

Before I plunge into the sermon, let me speak a word to anxious

men and women who are not yet saved, but who long to be partakers of life in Christ Jesus our Lord. You are in a conflict of soul just now. The Lord has set before you the promise, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." This you would fain believe, but you are staggered by the greatness of the mercy. How is God able to justify the ungodly? How can he have fellowship with you, for you are defiled with sin? You seem to yourself to have been such a monster of unbelief and enmity against God that you can never be put among the children. "How can these things be?" is the inquiry of your trembling spirit. Can a lion become a lamb? a sinner be turned into a saint? Can the leopard lie down with the kid? a rebel become a companion of those who fear the Lord? Can a man who merits the fiercest wrath of God yet live in his love, and delight himself in his favour? Is it not beyond belief that one steeped in evil should, at last, be found without fault before the throne of God? God promises eternal life to all who believe on his Son Jesus; but how can it be fulfilled? Here is the struggle. I want you, dear friend, before I go fully into my subject, to pick up at once the thread of it, and say, "I see where the preacher is driving. He wants me to believe that God can do anything which he has promised to do, seeing that he can raise the dead, and call the things that are not as though they were." Get this one thought into your mind, and I hope it will be a help to you in the hour of conflict between faith and feeling.

First, let me try and show *the time for the exercise of such a faith;* or, when shall we rest on resurrection and creation? Secondly, let us look upon *the basis of this faith;* and then, thirdly, let us sum up *the outcome of such a faith.* If we really get such a faith, it will be fruitful in abundant blessing.

I. THE TIME FOR SUCH A FAITH AS THIS. To believe God unstaggeringly in the teeth of appearances—when is the best time for this? This duty is not at its best when all goes well with us; for when we walk by sight, we scarcely walk by faith. When the soul is full of joy, there is wide space for gratitude, but narrower room for faith. "What a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" The light of fleeting day is not for perceptions which deal with eternity: faith's hour of prime is midnight. Even a horror of great darkness affords her a better opportunity for communion with the covenant God. Faith beholds her visions in the night: she wants not earthly light. A blind man loses nothing by the set of sun, and faith loses nothing by the removal of outward evidences. Faith has wrought many of her greatest deeds in hours which seemed least suitable for her undertakings. Like David's hero, she slays her lion in the pit in the time of snow. Like Jacob, she wrestles with the angel, and wins the victory, when night has fallen on all the world. Sunshine-faith comes and goes; true faith stands sentry at all hours. Fair-weather faith is poor stuff; give me winter-faith, which has warmth within it when the blasts from the north freeze flesh and blood, even to the bone.

First, *as to trusting God on account of the resurrection,* we shall find it greatly in season *when our soul is at first made to feel its spiritual death.* I am addressing some who mournfully cry, "How

can I be saved? I am as dead as the earth I stand upon. I feel nothing.

'I hear, but seem to hear in vain,
Insensible as steel;
If aught is felt, 'tis only pain
To find I cannot feel.'

My heart is as iron hardened in the forges of hell. I am without God, and without hope; and yet I do not mourn over my sin, nor feel my awful position as I ought to do. I fear I am dead in trespasses and sins, and I ask with the prophet, 'Can these dry bones live?' " Now is a special time, poor sinner, for believing in God that quickeneth the dead. Now is thy choice opportunity for testing the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus, who said, "I am the resurrection and the life." God can keep his promise of grace to thee, even to thee, if thou believest; for he quickeneth the dead. Thou believest that all the dead shall rise at the last day; canst thou not believe that, though thou art spiritually dead, God can quicken thee? Canst thou not believe in the power of the Lord to carry out his word? If resurrection has been wrought by him, all things are possible with him. If thou art as a dead man, as stiff and cold to heavenly things as though thou wert a corpse, yet God can quicken thee into newness of life. Is not this plain enough? Believest thou this? If thou canst believe it, thou art on the way to salvation. If thou canst trust God in Christ to make thee live, man, thou livest! The very fact that thou dost trust in Christ Jesus for eternal life proves that thou hast eternal life; for Jesus said, "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life." Even now, while conscious of so much death, believe in God, who quickeneth the dead.

Next, there is another notable occasion for faith, when the child of God is *in apprehension of death through soul trouble.* He is crying, like David in the eighty-eighth psalm, "My soul is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh unto the grave." Though not absolutely dead as to spiritual things, yet the little life which remains is weak, faint, slumbering, and lethargic. I think I hear you cry, "I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand." Now is the season to glorify God by believing the promise. You have the sentence of death in yourself, that you may not trust in yourself, but in the Lord alone. Your old sins rise up and accuse you: your present evil tendencies, like a rotting body of death, surround you; you find no comfort or joy in life. It seems as though God had given you up, and left you to perish. Though once you rejoiced before him, you are forced to sigh as one forsaken of his God, shut up for destruction. Now, even now, you are on a vantage-ground for glorifying the Lord by faith. It may be that, at this time, you enjoy nothing when you go up to religious services, and in reading or praying at home the chill of death makes every godly exercise a burden. You are so harassed with fears, so worried with cares, so tortured with regrets, and so tried with temptations that you are forced to cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Come, my brother,

look to the strong for strength! Thou canst do nothing, it is clear; therefore cast thyself on him who is able to quicken the dead. Is there not foothold here? To thee, even to thee, though thou be moaning out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" to thee, I say, comes this brave hope, "The Lord is risen indeed," and he that believes in him, though he were dead, yet shall he live! Believe thou that word, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"; and that other, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Surely, if thou rememberest that God quickens the dead, thou canst believe that he will preserve thy soul when heart and flesh fail thee!

To another character is a like opportunity offered. *When death threatens to reach us through temporal trouble*, then may we believe in him that quickeneth the dead. It may be that the arrows of death have slain your dearest and best, and, at the same time, you have suffered crushing losses in business, sickness of body, and crosses in your family circle. You think you could truly say with David, "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." If God does not soon interfere, you will either be dead, or worse than dead. You cry, "I am afflicted, and ready to die, from my youth up." Listen, my brother, listen hopefully. Thou believest that the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. Surely, he that can raise the myriads of the dead, can deliver thee out of thy killing troubles. He can bring thee through the valley of the shadow of death, and give thee beauty for ashes. I know he can, and so dost thou know it. Doubt no longer, but rest thou in the life-giving God, and he will deliver thee. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all;" and so he will deliver you.

One more case occurs to me. This is a very sad one to my own heart. *When death crushes down the church*, and there seems no sign of revival, then should we believe in the God of resurrection. The carnal man cares nothing for the condition of the church of God; but the spiritual man takes pleasure in her stones, and favours the dust thereof. Some of us would sooner suffer personal calamity than see the cause of God and truth in a low condition. It may be that, in the church of which you are a member, you pine under a blight. Little prayer, no Christian fellowship, very few conversions, very little desire to win souls: your heart sinks within you, for death is all around. You look abroad, and there is the same state of things. We are sweltering in false doctrine and suffocating in worldliness. In many quarters, religion itself seems dead, and buried beneath a mound of rubbishing entertainments. What then? Where shall we turn for comfort? There are a few good, faithful men left; but it will be vain to trust in them; what can they do? We resolve to hold fast by the faith ourselves; but we dare not trust to resolves, for a witchery is abroad which would fascinate the very elect. Here is our mainstay: God is able to quicken the dead. Of the stones of Jordan's river, he is able to raise up children unto Abraham. The Lord God is able, from the slums and dens of London, to call a people that shall maintain his truth. God that quickeneth the dead can either work the seven-fold miracle

of arousing his dead church, and making it a power to bless the world; or he can set existing churches on one side, and call them a people that were not a people, and her beloved that was not beloved. Have faith in God that quickeneth the dead that none of his promises or purposes will fall to the ground.

I turn now to the other ground of Abraham's hope. He had no child, and yet God tells him that he shall have a seed as numerous as the stars of heaven. How is the man of God to believe this? *His second holdfast is the creating power of God:* He calleth the things which be not as though they were. He can create as well as quicken. When can we use this fact as a reason for faith?

Friend, look to this, *when necessary graces are lacking in thy heart.* Though thou canst not find one of the saving graces within thy soul, yet believe in the promise of the Lord. What if within thy bosom at present there seems to be neither repentance, nor faith, nor hope, nor love, yet the Lord can create them all within thee. He can call the things that are not, and they will appear. Those of us who carry about with us a body of flesh and blood, are sometimes horribly cast down. When we look within, even by the candle of the Word, there are times when we cannot find in our own souls anything which we would wish to find: peace has fled, love is languishing, holiness is grieving, joy is banished: we are not fruitful, nor useful, nor happy; and yet we cannot give up our faith, but would fain have it strengthened. Then let us believe in him who maketh all things new. He will create in us the new heart and the right spirit, and call out graces which are not ours as yet.

"Well," cries a child of God, "I think I can find faith, and a little love; but what shall I do *when joy and peace are gone?* I have lost the rest I once enjoyed. I cannot sing as once I did, when I thought I could out-sing the seraphim, because my indebtedness to infinite love was greater than theirs." Ah, well, dear friend! God can create joy and peace, and put them in your soul, as new gifts from heaven; for he "calleth those things which be not as though they were." Believe for faith, believe for hope, believe for peace, believe for joy. These graces are set upon lower graces: "grace for grace." You rise not on stepping-stones of your dead selves, but on the ladder of the creating God, who has said, "I create the fruit of the lips; peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him."

I spoke just now in reference to temporal troubles; there is a grand platform for faith *when no help is visible.* When you cannot see any friend who will assist you, nor any way in which you can help yourself, then trust in the Creator, who can make a way. Our friends, like swallows, soon quit us when our summer is over, but God's promise is not dependent upon man's faithfulness. We do not see how we can be delivered; but then the Lord's way is in the sea, and his footsteps are not known. My dear friend, do you not believe in God, your Maker, who calleth things that are not as though they were? He can deliver you by means unknown to yourself. Lean hard upon the creating arm. Trust in God, though the fig-tree do not blossom, though there be no herd in the stall, nor flock in the

fold, nor corn in the barn. Trust in the promise, "Thou shalt dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." The Lord that made heaven and earth can set bread on thy table, and put clothes on thy back.

Once again let me speak of *the church in evil days*. Let us trust the Creator concerning his new creation. You bemoan yourself because you are not clothed with power from on high to bring sinners to Jesus. When you get into your class, you feel yourself to be as a dry tree, and not as Aaron's rod, which budded, and brought forth almonds. If you preach, you feel unfit for the hallowed employ. What is worse, the same weakness is almost everywhere. Few seem raised up to preach with power, and to lead on the hosts of God to victory. This is very sad: but suppose death to be everywhere, death in the pew, and death in the pulpit, death among the prophets, and death among the people; yet the Lord, who calleth things that are not as though they were, has but to give the word, and great will be the company of them that publish it. Our royal Leader has hidden forces at his command. Sir Walter Scott speaks of the highland chieftain, in the lone glen, who gave his whistle shrill, and straightway an army arose where none had been seen before—

> "From shingles gray their lances start,
> The bracken-bush sends forth the dart,
> The rushes and the willow-wand
> Are bristling into axe and brand,
> And every tuft of broom gives life
> To plaided warrior armed for strife."

Thus can our Lord garrison his church in a moment. In her desolation he can people her with such multitudes that she shall ask, "Who hath begotten me these?" The Lord can send martyrs if they be wanted, confessors, preachers, writers, and consecrated men and women of every sort. Let us have no timorous thoughts; but let us glorify God by firm faith.

Thus have I set before you the fact that our times of deadness and discontent are grand seasons for believing in him that quickens the dead, and calls all things into being.

II. Secondly, we will observe upon how these things are manifest to us, even resurrection and creation. We shall speak of THE BASIS OF THIS FAITH.

If our faith is to be based on resurrection, what do we know about it? Paul seems to pass over every other resurrection, and to dwell only upon *the resurrection of our Lord*. See the closing verses of this chapter: "If we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Brethren, you believe that our Lord was crucified, pierced to the heart, dead and buried. A stone was rolled to the mouth of the grave, and that stone was sealed and guarded lest the body should be stolen; but yet he rose from the dead. It glads my heart to hear a great multitude sing—

> "Death cannot keep his prey—
> Jesus, my Saviour!
> He tore the bars away—
> Jesus, my Lord!

Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And he lives for ever with his saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!"

Realize that resurrection more and more, for there lies your hope. Hear this! Our Lord "was delivered for our offences." God gave him up to justice, as if he had said, "Take him away: I have laid on him the transgressions of my people—take him to the place of chastisement. Condemn him, scourge him, crucify him; for he is made a curse for my people. I have delivered him up, I have left him, and forsaken him." See the soldiers lead him through the streets of Jerusalem! See, they fasten his hands and feet with nails to the cruel cross! Behold him lifted up to die in agony extreme! He dies: they take down those precious limbs, wrap them in white linen, and place them in the sepulchre. He is delivered unto the grave for our offences. There went all my sin, and the sins of all believers: he made an end of sin in his death. The wrath of God was spent upon him for those sins which were made to meet in the person of the Well-Beloved, and now those sins are gone for ever. How do we know? We know that it is so because our Surety is set free. To meet our debt he was put in prison. When he paid the debt, he would be liberated, but not till then. When he was raised again it was because our justification was accomplished. A public declaration was given that the debt was discharged, and the everlasting righteousness was brought in. Right well do we sing—

'He bore on the tree the sentence for me,
And now both the Surety and sinner are free."

If Christ be raised from the dead, believers are no more guilty before God, for their guilt must have been put away, or else their Representative would not have risen. If God has let our Representative and Substitute go, we are free. What a glorious rock this is! Cannot you get upon it—the resurrection of your blessed Lord? This is a fact proved beyond any other fact in history, and means this to us, that he has completed the work by which his people are saved. Hallelujah!

"If Jesus had not paid the debt
He ne'er had been at freedom set";

but in the prison of the grave he would have been incarcerated to this hour. God, who has raised his Son, and thereby set free his people, may well be trusted to fulfil every promise. To this I add that we know that all the dead will rise; and surely on this ground we may rest in the Almighty God. We have seen others spiritually quickened, and made to live unto God; yea, more, in the case of many of us, we, who were dead in trespasses and sins, have been quickened; and therefore, knowing of a surety that God quickeneth the dead, we are persuaded that what he has promised he is able to perform. We are eternally secure in a risen Saviour, because all the promises are

in him yea and amen; and the fact of his rising proves that he can do all things for us.

If you desire another basis for your faith—and we hardly think you do—there is *creation*. If you wish to strengthen your faith, behold creation, and you have not far to go: your own body is full of wonders. See the fields with their ripe harvest; wander in the woods and forests, mark the hills and valleys, the rippling brooks and flowing streams, and the wide expansive ocean. Look up to the sun, the clouds, the sky. Go out at night, and watch the moon and stars. Who made all these? Who leadeth them out in their order? Who built the unpillared arch, which covers all things? Who created everything, from the tiniest atom up to the greatest world? Who but God? Surely he that made all these can make me a new creature in Christ Jesus. He that made all these things can make me meet to be a partaker with the saints in light. If he chooses to be a potter, as he does, he can make me revolve upon his wheel, and with every touch of his finger he can impart beauty to me till he has made me symmetrical in holiness, and fit for the Master's use. We, seeing the works of his hand all around us, ought to believe in him without a doubt. Mungo Park, the African traveller, lost his way in the wilds, and there and then was cheered by viewing a tiny moss, and marking its singular beauty. He saw the finger of God in that small object, and felt sure that the great God would take care of him. So may we be taught faith by every created thing: the Creator can do all things.

When you have looked at creation, remember providence, which is a prolongation of the creative act. The power which made all things upholds them. The Lord keeps them in their places, or they could not remain. They tell us nowadays that the universe stands because of law. Is there any power about a mere law? No, my friends: law requires the almighty power of the living God! Nowadays, philosophers are quick to claim for men freedom of action; but the Lord, who made man, is spoken of as if he were no free agent, but the mere slave of laws. Everybody is now to be a free agent save only the living God. Is this philosophy? Is this reason? Is God the captive of his own laws? I know no such God. He doeth all things. Natural laws are but the summary of God's usual way of working; but the laws neither hinder God in anything, nor perform anything, as of themselves. He himself causeth everything to abide, or to change, as seemeth him good. As you see everything upheld by the word of his power, surely you have good ground for believing in his power to keep his promise to you.

Meanwhile, a creation work of grace is going on around you. If you do not feel it in yourself, my brother, you can soon see it in others. Speak to the people of God, and they will tell you; and to new converts, and they will show you. The story of what free grace has done is ever telling, yet untold. One will tell you, "I was a drunkard, and the Lord converted me." Another will confess, "My feet had almost gone, but the Lord preserved me." Another will declare, "I was in the furnace, and the Son of man walked in the fire with me." Another will testify, "I was brought low, and he

helped me." You will have abundant evidence that grace-creation is going on continually, and that God is working great wonders in the midst of his people; wherefore, be of good courage, and put your trust in the God of the new creation.

I wish the grace of God would bring every one of you as far as we have now come, namely, to believe that he who raises the dead, and creates out of nothing, can do for us what we need. We have an Almighty God to deal with: and his grace is linked with his omnipotence, and his love is as large as his power. I want you to trust him. Oh, if you have never done so, do it now! God help you! If you are holding on to anything but God in Christ Jesus, let it go—let it go at once! You will not hurt by falling into the unseen arms. I have heard of one who, wandering in the night, came to what he thought to be an awful precipice; and as he was about to fall, in sheer desperation he caught the root of a tree, and held there for dear life. His arms were weary; his hands were ready to fail him; but he held on with a death-grip. At last he was obliged to give up his hold, and when he had done so, down he fell; and you expect me to add that he was dashed to pieces. No, he only fell a few inches upon a soft bed of moss, for he was not near a precipice after all. When you let go all other trusts, you think it an awful thing to fall into your Saviour's arms; but it is not so: it is not a dangerous venture, but a wise reliance. If faith falls, she falls upon the bosom of her God. If you trust him who loved you unto death, you are safe and happy. Give up all earthly confidence, all human hope, and repose in Jesus crucified, and you shall find rest unto your souls.

III. But now, let us review THE OUTCOME OF THIS FAITH. May we all see the same results in ourselves through the Holy Ghost!

Abraham believed, and *looked at things from God's standpoint.* "As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations, before him whom he believed, even God." Abraham looked at the promise as Abraham, and he could not see how it could be. He had no child, and his wife was old. But God calls him by the name which signified "Father of a multitude," because he viewed him as such, and the Lord talked to him about his household after him, about their number, and about their being strangers in a strange land. To God's foreseeing eye Abraham was what he was to become: he calls the things that are not as though they were. Now, faith has the wonderful property of becoming like the God in whom it trusts, and of looking at things as God sees them. How I wish, my dear, tried brother, you could see your troubles as God sees them—namely, as means to your advancement in grace! Look at affliction to-day as a process that is enriching you. Sinner, when you believe in Jesus, God looks at you as saved, justified, forgiven, and quickened into eternal life. If you believe in Jesus, see yourself as God sees you. It is a great thing for a sinner, dead in himself, to say, "And yet I live;" but assuredly he may say it. It is a great thing for one consciously guilty to say, "And yet I am justified:" still, it is true, and it is no presumption to believe it. Oh, this is a grand art, to look at things from God's point of view! Faith takes the omnipotence of God, and girds herself with his almighty power; and then she takes the foresight of God; and

though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, faith perceives that in Christ the poor, trembling, and guilty soul is made pure, spotless, and glorious before God. Believer in Jesus, know yourself to be what the gospel says you are, and hold on to that knowledge. However desperate the tug may be, never let go your conviction that God's view of you in Christ is the true one. God sees the truth of things, and teaches faith to see the same. Justification by faith is no fiction; it is a fact that the believer is just, is saved, is complete in Christ Jesus. God give us to see this fact, even as he sees it, and then, being justified by faith, we may have peace with God.

Next, you see that Abraham *considered his body now dead.* Our Authorized Version runs thus:—"He considered *not* his own body now dead." The Revised Version has: "He considered his own body now as good as dead." It is a curious fact that among the ancient manuscripts there are two readings of almost equal value: one with the "not," and one without it. I think both mean the same thing. You say, "How is that?" He considered his own body to be dead, but he did not make any consideration of that fact, but believed in God all the same. He considered it so far as to be fully aware of it; but he did not consider it so as to raise a question about the fulfilment of the promise. He considered it to be true that he was past having a son in the strength of nature, but he considered that he should have a son through the power of the promise. God could work out his purpose as well with Abraham and Sarah in old age as in their youth. O poor seeking soul, listen to this! Know yourself to be spiritually dead. Think as badly of yourself as ever you like, for you are worse than you think you are; but after you have considered the fearful fact of your lost estate, do not go on to consider it as any hindrance to God in the work of his grace. Jesus is able to save you over the head of all your death, and guilt, and corruption. If you have been a thief, a Sabbath-breaker, a liar, a swearer, a murderer, yet he can forgive you; and if to-day you feel so dead that you can do nothing towards your own salvation, yet if you will believe his promise, he that can raise the dead can save you from the guilt and power of sin. Do not consider your helpless state to be any barrier to free grace, for the love of God will triumph over all your loathsomeness and death.

Abraham, as the outcome of his faith, *obeyed God in all things*—a very essential point, this. Believing God, he left his estates in Ur of the Chaldees, and came to Canaan, to live in tents, and wander about like a gipsy, that he might dwell where the Lord had called him to sojourn alone, a stranger in a strange land. If you believe the promise of the gospel, you will come out from the world, you will come out from sin, and you will become one of those strangers who follow Jesus whithersoever he goeth. God will be your Leader, Christ will be your Commander; and though *in* the world you will not be *of* the world. All true believers, like Abraham, obey. Obedience is faith in action. You are to walk in the steps of the faith of father Abraham. His faith did not sit still, it took steps; and you must take these steps also by obeying God because you believe him. That faith which has no works with it is a dead faith, and will justify no one. How should a dead thing justify? Faith, knowing a thing to be

true, acts upon that truth, and is thus itself justified, or proved to be justly called faith.

And then the result was that *Abraham enjoyed the promise.* I have often thought of the old man laughing at the thought of the birth of a son to him in his hundredth year. Two people may do the same thing, and in the one it may be right, and in the other it may be wrong. Sarah laughed because she thought it absurd, and could not believe it; but Abraham laughed because he did believe it, and realized it. He knew it would be so, and he began to laugh with joy and gladness. Oh, for more of such laughing! He believed himself to be the father of many nations, and the old man laughed, and laughed again; it seemed such a fountain of happiness to him. If you believe, you will laugh too. We have too much crying among us. Oh, for a little more filling of the mouth with laughter, and the tongue with singing, for the Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad! It is not a fiction, it is a fact. The Lord has given us eternal life in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us laugh and laugh again, for an unutterable joy of heart floods our spirit. Bunyan pictures Christiana as saying to Mercy, "What was the matter that you did laugh in your sleep to-night?" And Mercy said, "But are you sure I laughed?" When she told her dream, Christiana said, "Laugh! ay, well you might to see yourself so well." She laughed because she dreamed she had been welcomed into glory. To faith this is no dream. We have had many dreams of this sort, and we know that we are saved by grace, adopted of the Father, united to the Son, indwelt by the Holy Ghost—visions most true; and these have made us laugh with an inward, inexpressible delight. The more steadfastly we believe, the more of this rapturous joy we shall experience.

Best of all, because of this, *Abraham was accounted righteous.* And who accounted him righteous? Well, not the sons of men; they knew him as righteous only by his outward character; but God accounted him righteous because he had faith. The moment you believe in his risen Son, God counts you righteous; and as you keep on believing, God accounts you righteous. "Oh, but I am a poor, imperfect creature!" God counts you righteous. "I strive after holiness, but I am not what I want to be." God counts you righteous. God never makes mistakes; he never mis-counts. If he counts a man righteous, that man is righteous, depend upon it—righteous in such a way that he may stand before the judgment-seat of God at the last, and none shall be able to lay anything to his charge.

> "Bold shall I stand in that great day,
> For who aught to my charge shall lay?
> While through thy blood absolved I am
> From sin's tremendous curse and shame."

Believe, and you shall be accounted righteous. The Lord help you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis xv. 1—6; Romans iv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—122 (Song I.), 621, 193.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

NOT SUFFICIENT, AND YET SUFFICIENT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 24TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."—2 Corinthians iii. 5, 6.

Read also the Revised Version of the same text, for it will be often used in this discourse:—

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God; who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."—2 Corinthians iii. 5, 6.

PAUL had given some account of what God had done by him, and had described the work in these words—"Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." Before he had worked out that charming figure, he had asked the question in the sixteenth verse of the second chapter: "Who is sufficient for these things?" I seem to hear that question repeated as he finishes the description. The more wonderful the work, the more intense the inquiry: "Who is sufficient for these things?" Who can turn hearts of stone into flesh? Who can write without ink? Who can write on the heart? Who can so write that what is written shall be eternal? "Who is sufficient for these things?" The more we study the work of grace wrought by God through his ministers, the more are we forced to ask, "Who is sufficient for these things?" To raise the dead, to turn a stone to flesh; who is sufficient for these? To give eyes to the blind, and ears to the deaf; to subdue the proud will, and enlighten the darkened heart; to deliver men from the fascinations of sin and Satan, to bring them out of darkness into God's marvellous light, to turn rebels into sons of God; who is sufficient for these things? Yet nothing less than this will bring salvation. Here we have a chain of miracles, an Alpine range of wonders piled upon each other, yet no one marvel can be dispensed with; and we are to be the ministers by whom such miracles are wrought: "Who is sufficient for these things?"

Having asked the question, Paul now gives an answer to it in the words of my text. All these wonders have been wrought; men have had their minds written upon by the finger of God, and the stony heart has become a tablet of flesh; and all this has been done by the agency of men: ministers have been in God's hands the means of working stupendous wonders of grace, yea, of turning the world upside down, and of saving men from going down into the pit. Since these things have been done, there must have been some kind of sufficiency, or adaptation, in the means by which they were done. Whence came it? Was it natural to the men, or did they acquire it by education, or by practice, or by imitation? The apostle goes on to answer the question by telling us what that sufficiency was not, and what it was. He replies to his own inquiry—"Who is sufficient for these things?"

I. By your leave, we shall first of all regard the text as AN ANSWER TO THE MINISTER'S QUESTION, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

The answer is given first, in the negative; and secondly, in the positive.

"Who is sufficient for these things?" *The negative reply* is—"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves."

In this instance *the best of preachers disowns self-sufficiency*. Remember who it is that is writing. It is Paul, called to be an apostle, to whom the Lord Jesus had personally appeared; a man of singular zeal and activity, and of remarkable ability in the things of God. He was not a whit behind the chief of the apostles, an expounder of the truth, a founder of churches, a father of myriads of souls; yet he says, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves." He was, when he wrote this epistle, no beginner in holy oratory; but a well-exercised evangelist. He had been taught of God deeply, had preached the Word fully, and had gained an experience unrivalled. Beginning with a wonderful conversion, going on through sufferings, persecutions, journeys, and labours, he had become a man of great weight and influence. Although long dead, his word would be law to us at this moment; and yet he confesses, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves." Here was a man, too, who had been inspired by the Holy Spirit—a man to write epistles to churches, a man who spoke with divine authority, and would not allow that authority to be questioned, for he felt that he was truly sent of God; and yet you see him bowing humbly down before the throne of the heavenly grace, and owning his own impotence in these words: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves." I cannot leave this point; for here we have a most successful soul-winner making his lowly acknowledgment. How many were already in heaven, converted under the ministry of the apostle Paul! How many on earth were on the road to glory, led there by his teaching! How many had he inspired with the courage of martyrs, with the holiness of saints! He was a mine of spiritual wealth to the churches. I know no man who did more for the propagation of the faith than the indefatigable Paul; and yet he cries, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves."

Brethren, if Paul is not sufficient of himself, what are you and I? Where are you, ye lay preachers, and Sunday-school teachers, and workers for God in different ways? Do you indulge the dream of

self-sufficiency? Be ashamed of your folly in the presence of a great man who knew what he said, and who spoke under the direction of the Spirit of God, and wrote deliberately, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves."

And this negative is strengthened by the fact that *he did not feel sufficient in a very needful point:* "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves *to think anything* as of ourselves." I believe that our old translation is as good as good can be, and that it sets forth the meaning of the Greek better than any other—"We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves." I do not intend to insist upon this meaning as the only one, for I will bring in the Revised Version directly: still, our version is to be defended, and in any case its meaning must be retained. What! was not the apostle able to do his own thinking? Must he receive thinking-grace—help to think aright? In these days we are rather overdone with "great thinkers." Wherever you go you hear of "advanced thinking," "modern thought," and so forth. It is true that ten bushels of the stuff are not worth half a farthing in the estimate of those who hunger for spiritual food; but chaff takes up much room, and as the wind blows it about it excites great attention. A fourth part of a cab of doves' dung, worth nothing in ordinary times, fetched a long price during the famine in Samaria; and to-day, when there is a famine of true theological learning, a great fuss is made concerning the crude speculations of vainglorious "thinkers." I do not believe the apostle ever tried to think upon religious matters otherwise than as the Spirit of God taught him. He was content to abide within the circle of inspiration. I pray that we may never travel beyond our orbit, and quit the divine circuit of revelation. I find enough in my Bible to think about without going beyond that sphere. If we should ever exhaust Holy Scripture, we might then try to think something "as of ourselves"; but as we shall never do that, we may be satisfied to tarry in revelation as in a land which floweth with milk and honey. Let us not aim at being original thinkers, but at being witnesses and heralds of what God says to men. Our Lord Jesus strove not to be an original thinker, for he said, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." The Holy Ghost does not speak as an original thinker; for the Lord Jesus said, "He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you." As we have reminded you before, the original thinker of the Bible is one of whom it is said, "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own." We are not wishful to emulate him in such originality. We are not sufficient to think anything as from ourselves!

Yet, thinking is the preacher's domain. He has to think of the fitness of a subject for his discourse; but he will not find his right subject by mere thinking; he must wait upon his Master for guidance. When he has found his subject he must work it out in his own mind; and yet he is so insufficient in and of himself that he will not work it out aright unless he cries to the Holy Spirit to aid his thought and open to him the Scriptures. When the time has come for him to tell out what he has thought, he has to think over his subject aloud, and speak with the mouth that which he has moulded in his mind; and in

this he is greatly dependent upon the help of God. In pouring from one bottle into another how much is spilt! How often does it happen that as the neck of a bottle may be too small to receive what is abundantly poured out, so the mind to be filled may not be sufficiently receptive! To think aloud, which means to speak instructively, is no easy thing; and so to speak that men are saved by our speaking is quite beyond us. In this matter "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves." This impotence even in thought puts the preacher into a very lowly condition. In that position let him be content to remain. Let him look to the Lord for his thinking and speaking, and he will do well.

In the whole matter we are of ourselves insufficient. The Revised Version puts it—"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves." Now, this declaration has a further and wider sweep than the former; for, as I understand it, it includes all that I have said about thinking, and with it every other matter which is involved in our holy service. "We are not sufficient to account anything as from ourselves"; we have not enough sufficiency to be able to reckon any part of our ability as coming from ourselves. Does a man wish to reach the human mind with heavenly truth? He must do it by the sufficiency of God. Does he wish to get at peculiar cases? He must be instructed by the Spirit of God. Does he desire to arouse the careless? Let him look to the quickening Spirit. Does he wish to comfort the disconsolate, and cheer the despairing? He is not sufficient of himself for this; let him call upon the Comforter, even the Spirit of God. As to that deep mystery of our holy faith which is called regeneration, or the new birth, the preacher may not dare to think that he can perform *this*. Into that secret chamber where men are born from above none can intrude. He that worketh the new birth is God alone. In the new creation, as in the old, he taketh counsel with none. Of this especially all must say, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves."

Thus all must be of God. Our thought of divine doctrine, our preparation for the delivery of that thought, the choice of words for utterance, the very tone, and especially the spirit, the feeling, the faith with which the preacher delivers his message—all these are essential things, and in none of them is the preacher sufficient of himself.

You see, then, what the great doctor of grace, the grand teacher of the new covenant, thought of human sufficiency. If he felt that for the least as well as for the greatest thing in our ministry we must look to God, surely our experience confirms his statement. Let us take the lowest place, and in humble consciousness of inability, let us look to The Strong for strength; but never be so foolish as to rely upon ourselves.

We will now joyfully consider how the question is answered *positively*. There is an answer to the question, "Who is sufficient for these things?" The answer is, All who trust in the Lord are made "sufficient as ministers of a new covenant." This is explained to us in the first sentence, "*Our sufficiency is from God.*" In God there is all the wisdom, all the thought, all the love, all the power, all the conquering energy which a minister can require; and to work upon the

hearts of men there lies in the omnipotent grace of God a fulness of might, so that the stony heart shall be transformed, and on its fleshy tablet shall be written the will of the Lord. That our sufficiency should be of God is infinitely better than if it were of ourselves; for then our sufficiency cannot be questioned, cannot be suspended, cannot be exhausted. If you had to bear your own charges, you might soon be bankrupt; but now you are like a child that travels with his father, and his father pays for everything. He has no care about cost, he is not called upon to exercise a pinching economy; he draws upon an inexhaustible purse for all he needs, and leads a princely life; for his father pays for all. Our sufficiency is of God; let us practically enjoy this truth. We are poor, leaking vessels, and the only way for us to keep full is to put our pitcher under the perpetual flow of boundless grace. Then, despite its leakage, the cup will always be full to the brim. "Our sufficiency is of God." "I do not feel able," cries one, "to win a soul. I feel it is a work too hard for me." Continue to feel that truth; but at the same time let faith balance the feeling by reminding you that "Our sufficiency is of God." Brother, if God sends you he will go with you; and if God gives you a message to deliver, he will prepare the ear and the heart for that message. Blessed words these for every minister of Christ, and for all of you who in any way are working for his dear name. "Our sufficiency is of God."

In very deed *we are made sufficient;* for the apostle says, "Who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant." The Lord makes his servants sufficient for the work required of them. If we had to change the heart, we should not be sufficient; if we had to write upon the heart by the power of the Spirit, we should not be sufficient; for the Spirit of God is not at our command. But if we occupy only this position—that we bear witness to God's new covenant promises, then his grace makes us sufficient. There is a little valve in an engine which if it be touched will set its whole machinery in motion. That engine may be turning a number of wheels, and we should not be able to do the work of all this machinery; and yet in another sense we are quite capable of doing all the work; for by turning a certain handle the engine puts forth its power, the wheels move, and the work is done. A little child with trembling finger can set loose tremendous forces, and so accomplish enormous results. Beloved, we are made much of by God; but we of ourselves are nothing. I said to myself, as I came hither this morning—What is my part in the matter? Set in a valley of dry bones, I ask myself, "Can these dry bones live?" If I had to make them live, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But my work is not to make the dry bones live. The breath from the four winds will do that. My work is not even to put the bones together, bone to its bone. I could not re-fashion the scattered anatomies. What have I to do, then? I have but to prophesy and say, "Thus saith the Lord." Now, for this, grace has given me a sufficiency. It is not, "Thus I say"; not "Thus I think"; but "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." For that proclamation I have received ability from the Holy Spirit, and I do not fear to exercise it. We are made sufficient to be ministers of the new covenant.

Hear a lesson. Dear Christian lady, you have been lamenting, "Alas! I am not sufficient for my class." You are sufficient if this is what the Lord has called you to do. To pray for those girls, to tell them the way of salvation, and with loving heart to weep them to the Saviour: the Lord can make you sufficient for this. Yonder dear friend says, "I have been preaching in a village, and the people are so dull that I cannot move them. I am not sufficient for the task." Go and confess that fact to your Lord, and then begin again with the sufficiency of God, and you will mark a change come over the spirit of the scene. I pray you, do not despair. The painful discovery of your own insufficiency ought to be the means of leading you to the Lord, and so of girding you with new strength.

The apostle evidently means that *through grace we are adapted to the work*:—"He hath made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant." We are not ministers of the old covenant of command and threatening; for, if we were so, we might exceedingly fear and quake; but we are sent to be ministers of the spirit of that covenant which saith, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." We are ministers of a covenant of pure grace, in which God, and not man, is the worker. We are, by the truth, spoken in love, to convey to men's hearts the Holy Ghost. We are ministers, not of the letter of the law, which killeth; but of the spirit, that giveth life. "Oh!" saith one, "that is hard work." It seems to me, on the contrary, to be the easiest of work when divine power works in us. Shall I tell you what is wanted to make a man sufficient for it? He must be able to bear personal witness to the truth of God. Were you ever filled with life by the spirit of the new covenant—the covenant of gracious promise? Then you can tell poor sinners where life is to be had. Were you slain by the law, and are you made alive by the Spirit of God? Then you will preach of the law of God tremblingly, and you will speak of life in Jesus Christ with living certainty. Do you know in your own soul what it is to be quickened by the Holy Ghost? If not, hands off the ark of God! But if divine power has come upon you, and you have been made to live the life of faith in Christ Jesus, then you have one point of ability to be a minister. Beyond this, a living, loving heart is a great necessity. Have tender sympathy with those who have not so learned Christ, and feel an intense desire that they may obtain eternal life. Bring your spiritual life into contact with their spiritual death, and as one candle lights another, so may the Lord convey life into other hearts by your testimony. If our part were other than it is, we might despair; but if we are called upon to be witnesses for God, and sympathizers with God, then this ability is to be had; yea, we trust the Lord has already "made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant."

Dear friends, there must be in us great longing of heart to be of service to our fellow-men. He that can come into his pulpit and preach, saying to himself, "I do not care whether souls are saved or not," will win no hearts for Jesus. But, oh! if God the Holy Ghost makes you tender towards never-dying souls, and eager to snatch them from the eternal burnings, then you have that kind of ability which will fit you for the Master's use. You see those wires which

pass along our roads; they are nothing but dead metal. Are they sufficient of themselves to spy out what is happening in the capital of France, and to report it here? No, not of themselves. Yet that unconscious wire is quite sufficient to accomplish the transmission of news from Paris. Information is obtained, and the wires flash the message under the sea to our door. The wire is quite sufficient, though not sufficient of itself. The Lord uses us as his telegraph wires to communicate between himself and fallen men; and we, by his almighty power, are made to convey to them the truth with power. It flashes from our heart and tongue to the ear and heart of the man whom the Lord intends to bless. The words which we speak are not ours, but the words of our Lord, who said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." May many of my hearers know this in their own cases!

II. I have worked out my first point, and we have viewed our text as the answer to the minister's question. Secondly, we must view the text as A DIRECTION TO THE HEARER'S THOUGHTS. These thoughts must again be both negative and positive.

The first negative counsel I suggest to you is this—*trust not your own sufficiency*. If we who preach to you, and if those who were far greater than we are, felt bound to say, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves," how little must your sufficiency be! It is very wonderful how fully in Scripture the inability of man is set out. Here we see our inability to think aright: "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves." In another passage we find that a good will is of the Lord. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." To will aright is more than to think aright; but we never make so distinct an advance as to will that which is good until we are made willing. When we get so far as that, we pull up all of a sudden, and make a dead halt, finding, with the apostle, "To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not"; then are we driven to God for power to turn our willing into acting. In this going to God we are brought to a stand-still again; for we read and feel that "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." What can we do, if even in prayer we fail? Suppose we are taught to pray, and, helped by the Spirit of God, we begin to work; yet we cannot keep on working without fresh grace; for David, when he had wrought up the people to a very high degree of consecration, thought it needful to pray that the Lord would "keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people." Our Saviour prayed, "Father, keep them"; for we soon go back to the old deadness and lethargy unless he that first made us still keeps us alive. Are any of you carelessly saying to yourselves, "I can be saved just whenever I like. I shall put off thought upon religious matters, for I can believe and pray, and live rightly at my own option. My salvation lies in my own power, and the keys of heaven swing at my girdle. I can delay as long as I please, and then at last cry, 'Lord have mercy upon me!' and go straight away from the stews to heaven." You will find the truth to be quite another thing. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of

him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." I shall pray God that this wicked self-sufficiency of yours may be driven out, and that you may learn the meaning of Jonah's words, "Salvation is of the Lord." I think this is a plain teaching of our text.

The next lesson I suggest to you is, *seek not another ministry*. It may be right, as far as I am concerned, that you should choose another preacher; but do not so on the ground that we are not sufficient; for he "made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant." Some run about from one preacher to another hoping to find a peculiar something in one which they have not found in another; but in all true preachers the sufficiency is one, for "our sufficiency is of God." Try the spirits, and hear only the man who preaches the truth of God, but look for nothing in the man. Anxiously wish to find eternal life; and if you are so seeking, our preaching is sufficient to bring it to you, for it has already brought it to thousands. In this house of prayer so many have found eternal life in Christ Jesus that we seek no letters of commendation as to our sufficiency in God. He has used us, and can use us again; and you, by earnestly hearing the gospel, if you be willing and obedient, shall eat the good of the land; but if you do not bow your necks to the sceptre of divine grace, it shall not be through our deficiency that you are lost, but through your own rejection of the Saviour.

The next negative lesson that the hearer should learn is, *rely not on your own thoughts*. Here the apostle says, "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves." Do not, I pray you, therefore, indulge the cogitative faculty at the expense of believing. Some are always trying to dive deep into things, and they go so far down into mysterious subjects, and debated doctrines, that they stir up the mud at the bottom, and they cannot see anything themselves, neither can we see what they are at. What think you? A man is perishing. A life-belt is thrown to him, and he will not touch it till he knows in what shop the belt was made, and whether the workpeople are paid good wages. Poor soul! he will die because his mind is so enquiring, and his senses have gone wool-gathering at an unseasonable time. Jesus Christ is the Saviour for sinners; believe in him, and you shall live: be washed in his blood, and you shall be whiter than snow. Continually raising critical questions, and prying into the infinite nothingness, will surely land you on the dark shores of despair and death. Happy are they who believe, and take the Word of God, and rest thereon. "Still," says one, "surely you would have us think?" Yes, think as much as ever you can; but I am not authorized to preach to you, "He that *thinketh* and is baptized shall be saved"; but I am commanded to tell you, "He that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved." "But is there not such a thing as honest doubt?" cries one. I suppose there may be; but as the doubt which is now so popular ostentatiously labels itself "honest doubt," I am a little suspicious. If I were walking over lonely fields at night, and should meet a man, and he took the trouble to assure me over and over again that he was an honest man, I should not feel much reassured. If a man were cutting a pane of glass out of my window, in the middle of the night, and when challenged answered that he was an

honest man, I think I should let my dog loose, and leave *him* to decide the question. When a sect everlastingly prefaces all it has to say by claiming to be honest, I am rather inclined to suspect that it needs to give the assurance. The Chinese trader who put up over his shop, "*No cheatee here*," turned out to be the biggest rogue in the street. If you are honest, you will confess that you have sinned, and then you will come to Jesus for that remission of sins which comes through his sacrifice. Look to Jesus and live. He has borne away the sin of all believers. He suffered in the sinner's stead, and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Oh! if you believe in him, that act of believing shall do more for you than seven ages of thinking could accomplish, so long as you refuse to accept the Saviour whom God himself has provided.

Once more, as a negative direction to the hearer, *let none of us be content with the letter*. Let no man rest in the hearing of the law, and the trying to keep the commandments; for by the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified in God's sight. What is meant by the letter here is evidently the law, if you note the context. The law condemns, and so is the ministration of death; the gospel brings the promise of the Spirit, and so is life. Be not satisfied with merely knowing the letter of even the New Testament; be not content with knowing the doctrines of grace, and being called orthodox; but seek to feel the power of gospel truth. There is a dead orthodoxy as well as a dead heterodoxy. You must have the spirit as well as the letter, or else the letter will be a savour of death to you. Power must be present as well as form, or else "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof," you shall be no nearer heaven than if you had not even the form.

Now, gather direction *positively*.

First, *look beyond us who are preachers; yea, look to the Spirit of God*. In the meetings of the Society of Friends they sometimes sit still, and nobody speaks. It would do us good to have an occasional silence, if so the people would learn to look clean away from human agency to the power of God. I think we may continue speaking; and yet if you are wise you will put no reliance upon us or our speaking apart from the Lord our God. Think not that you have done a good deed in merely coming to hear us talk. O friends, there must be more than words in the gospel ministry, or all will be vain! There must be a secret heavenly power in our testimony, or it is no better than dead. Our gospel is not a sword that glitters, but an edge that cuts, and wounds, and kills. Do you know the power of the Word? If not, I pray God you may know it; for without the Spirit of the Lord you are nothing, and have nothing. If you hear the preacher, and his thoughts, but have never felt the Holy Ghost revealing to you truth in the love of it, and in the power of it, you are in an evil case.

Further, *look beyond thought by faith*. Think, as we have already said; but still labour most after believing. To believe is to follow the way of salvation. Evermore it is written, "The just shall live by his faith." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." "He that believeth on Him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is

condemned already." O my hearer, thy chief business is to believe on the Son of God. To speak plainly, thou hast to believe in Christ or to be damned. Whatever thine own thoughts may be, thou must accept God's thoughts, and yield thine understanding, thine affections, and thy will, and accept God's terms of grace, which are that thou be nothing, and that Christ be everything. Oh! I pray you, dear hearers, if you do not by our ministry get help in the matter of faith, do not think that you have been helped at all; for all mere thinking out of problems, and working out of propositions, will leave you where you were. It is believing that brings eternal life into the soul; and the more believing there is, the more does that life abound.

Next, *look beyond the outward command even of the New Testament.* I need not exhort you to look beyond the commands of the Old Testament; you have done so: but even with the New Testament, you must not rest in the outward form of it. To believe that faith will save you, will not save you: you must exercise faith itself. To recognize that the believer should be baptized will not save you, but you must yourself believe and be baptized. Neither will the baptism save you unless you are buried with Christ in it. You must come and take Christ, and be washed from your sins in his precious blood, or you will die in your sins. To believe that the Holy Ghost can new-create you will not new-create you: you must in very deed be made a new creature in Christ Jesus by the Holy Ghost. Get beyond the mere shells of doctrine, and taste the heavenly kernel, which is the true food of the soul. My dear hearers, I am terribly afraid lest I should be ministering to your comfort while you are out of Christ. I come not here to be a fiddler at your feast of sin. I would not set the tune for you to dance by. My music is of another sort: it is a certain sound, which calls you to do battle for your lives against your sins. I pray you, put no reliance upon the externals of religion, but seek the inward and spiritual grace of which they are meant to be the channels. Repent; believe; lay hold on Christ and quit your hold of sin. Let not this exhortation be mere words to you. May the spirit of power go with the command, that you may repent and believe the gospel, and so may be saved. I beseech those of you who are regular hearers of the gospel to get beyond even the best of hearing. I will not say, "If you do not mean to lay hold on Christ do not come to hear, and thus increase your condemnation"; for you might take me at my word, and then I should be sorry for your absence. I should like you to remain within gun-shot of the gospel, for you may yet feel its power. But there are persons coming here regularly, and sitting in their pews, who are, I fear, deceiving their own souls by the very fact of their coming here. They think, because they have heard a sermon, that they must be the better for it. Alas! they may be all the worse for their hearing, for it may have flattered them in their self-righteousness, and made them more secure in their pride. Is it not foolish for any man to say, "I must be a good fellow, for I hear nothing unsound. I keep to the old gospel, and I am a constant attendant on the means of grace"? If you do not get the grace of the means, the means of grace will be of no avail to you. May God the Holy Spirit help you to get away from the mere letter to the real soul and spirit of the whole business!

May you feel, believe, and actually yield your heart to Christ! I have known some who were brought up to hear the truth from their childhood, and almost as a matter of course they joined the church in their youth, and they stood well as to moral character for years; but after a while they grew indifferent to divine things, and gradually wandered away into sheer worldliness, almost blaming others for allowing them to make a profession. In their case the Holy Ghost never wrote upon the tablets of flesh; but I scratched a letter or two on the unchanged stone. The work was never done by the Holy Spirit, but by parental influence and pastoral persuasion, and so in due season it all vanished. I pray God to save you from the religion which is born of excitement and revivalism, and shows itself in spasms. Come to close work with God by confessing your sin, and laying hold on Christ crucified with a real, living faith. May the truth of God be written on your hearts by the Spirit. God grant it!

III. I finish now by A LESSON TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

To you people of God, in your endeavour to spread the gospel, I say, first, whispering it in your ear, *trust no man who is self-sufficient.* Oh, yes, he can do it! It is easy to him to preach fine sermons. Bless you! He can do it at any time, and anywhere. He can convince and convert souls in any quantity. Did you read in the paper, "Glorious meeting! Eighteen souls out for salvation"? *He* was speaking that evening. *He* can fetch them. Certain other preachers doubt him; but that is all jealousy. He can do it—that he can. Let such a man go where pride is at home. Our lowly Lord will not have him. Christ's men are more apt at weeping than at bragging: they feel their inability rather than their ability. The man who does everything for the Lord is the man who cannot do anything without the Lord. The man that knows he is nobody, God will make somebody: but he that is strong and mighty, king and lord, master in the realm of thought, who can make his own theology, and so forth—he shall wander on till he loses himself among the dark mountains to his sure destruction. Do not be in a hurry to put self-confidence into a leading position; he will be better in the rear rank, if in the army at all.

Next, *doubt not the sufficiency of the gospel in any case.* Since our sufficiency is of God, you may take the gospel down that dark, horrible slum, where there are none but thieves and harlots, and it will do its work. Since our sufficiency is of God, with God all things are possible. You have a horrible neighbour, who seldom speaks without an oath: he is as wicked a man as ever lived, and therefore you never give him a sermon, or speak to him about Christ; for you fear that your gospel is not suitable for him. He is just the very man that God may bless. Go and try the unlikely one! Behold how the Pharisees and scribes enter not into the kingdom; but the publicans and harlots, conscious of their guilt, welcome the Saviour. Despair of nobody. If there is a spot on earth where the Missionary Society has no chance, to that place it ought first to send. Difficulties should be invitations, and impossibilities should be attractions. For "our sufficiency is of God." Is it not so?

The next lesson is, *value the new covenant.* See how Paul puts it: "We are sufficient ministers of a new covenant." In some congregations

people never hear the word "covenant"; and yet he that understands the two covenants has the key of theology. The covenants are the diamond hinges on which the golden doors of grace are made to turn. Dear Christian people, I pray you, value covenant blessings. Value the new covenant of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; the covenant, not of works, but of grace, which runs after this fashion: "I will, and they shall"; the covenant which secures the salvation of the chosen by guaranteeing all that is needed for eternal life. Prize the new covenant, and often speak of it.

Next, *let life be seen in all we do.* If our ministry is not of the letter, but of the Spirit, and of the Spirit that giveth life, our hearers ought to have an abundance of life. Many professors seem to have life only in a part of them. Some have life in the jaw, and can talk religion, but none in the hand, for they cannot act it. Some have life in the head, but they have none in the heart. Some I know have never much life in their hand, especially that hand which goes into their pocket; for it goes in dead, and comes out empty. Perhaps there would be some life in it if you made them an offer of a guinea: then they might stretch out their hand to receive it. We want to be filled with life to the full. Give me a Christian man all alive. Every bit and particle of us should respond to the gospel. Let but the gospel whisper, and we should be awake to hear it. When joy is the note, let us be glad; when faith is the note, let us believe up to the hilt; and when love is spoken of, may coals of juniper burn in our hearts. I hope many of that sort are here; yet are there some who are dead and cold. If they give you a shake of the hand you feel as though a dead fish were touching you: they are as cold as icebergs. Warm-hearted fellowship is a sweet sign of life.

And lastly, *glorify God, ye members of the church, in all that is done.* If the will of God be written on any heart, praise God for it. When any are converted, they should let the minister know: the instrument will have a rich reward in knowing that a soul is brought to Christ. But above all, there should be joy in the church and praise to God over every soul that is saved. And shall there not be some soul saved this morning? O my hearer, I pray God it may be thy soul. Dost thou believe that Jesus is the Christ? Then thou art born of God. Dost thou believe in thy heart that God hath raised Christ from the dead? Then thou shalt be saved. Wilt thou yield thyself up to Jesus that he should be thy Saviour and thy Lord? Dost thou lie at the feet of the All-merciful One, confess thy sin, and plead the blood of Christ? Go thy way; thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee; and let God have the glory of it for ever and ever. Brethren, if God has blessed you, *pray for us.* We are not sufficient of ourselves even to think anything from ourselves; therefore pray the Lord to be our sufficiency. Brethren, when God has blessed us, *praise with us;* for if the Lord has done it all, he must have all the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Cor. ii. 14—17; iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—906, 407, 455.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SELF LOW, BUT CHRIST HIGH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 31ST, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."—Matthew viii. 8.

THIS centurion was a worthy man from the human point of view; but he called himself unworthy when he turned towards our Lord. He was so excellent a man that the elders of the Jews, who were by no means partial to Roman soldiers, pleaded with Jesus that he was worthy. Had he been personally there, he would have repudiated their plea; and he did so by the second party of friends whom he sent to our Lord. As one set of friends had said, "He is worthy," another set of friends was bidden to say, in his name, "Lord, I am not worthy." The worthiest men in the world do not think themselves worthy; while the most unworthy people are generally those who boast of their own worthiness, and, possibly, of their own perfection. We should not have wondered had this man been proud; for he was one of the conquering race, and the representative of a tyrannical power. If he was not a very great officer, but only the captain of a hundred men, yet it is not unusual for petty officers to be more haughty than their superiors. If a man is placed in a very high and responsible position, he is frequently sobered by his responsibilities; but a mere jack-in-office is usually greater than the emperor himself. However, this centurion was a man of gentle mould, and said of himself, "I am not worthy."

He might have been proud of his popularity among the Jews. Few can bear to be surrounded with an atmosphere of esteem without beginning to esteem themselves much too highly. He had built for the Jews a synagogue. That is a good thing to do; but it is very possible to build a synagogue, and to become a great man in one's own opinion, and stand several courses of bricks higher in pride. Not so, however, this good man, who had built a synagogue, but did not presume upon the greatness of his own generosity. He never mentioned it: but said, "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof."

He was a man used to command. He saith to this man, "Go, and he goeth; and to another, come, and he cometh." They that are wont

to be obeyed are apt to hold themselves at a high valuation; but this centurion had not fallen into the very common fault. He watched carefully over the sickness of his young servant, and was earnest that he might be healed: he was a tender master as well as a liberal neighbour. If we wished to pick out a truly worthy man, we need not go further than this Roman soldier, or we might fare worse; and yet he said, "Lord, I am not worthy."

Further, note that he did not say, "Lord, the room in which my servant sleeps is not worthy of thee: and it is not meet that thou shouldest climb to the garret, where the boy lies sick"; but, "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof"—not even into the best parlour, or the drawing-room. It is my house; and being such, it is the abode of one who has not dared to seek a personal interview with thee, and I judge it to be altogether unfit for thine entertainment. He was fearful of troubling the Lord, and felt that to bring him through the street to his door was more than he could think of for a moment, when a word would suffice to work the miracle he sought.

Beloved friends, my point this morning is this—I would call your attention to the happy blending of this beautiful humbleness with an extraordinary degree of faith. In his confession of sin he is unsparing—"Lord I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof"; but in his confession of faith he is equally clear. "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." It is a kind of vulgar error that a lowly esteem of ourselves must be connected with a very great diffidence towards Christ. I call it a vulgar error; for it is an error both common and baseless. The fact is that high thoughts of self go with low thoughts of Christ; and well they may, for they are birds of a feather. But low thoughts of self should always be associated with high thoughts of Christ; for they are both products of the Spirit of God, and they help each other. Our unworthiness is a foil to the brightness of our Lord's infinite grace. We sink deep in humility, but soar high in assurance. As we decrease, Christ increases.

To make this point clear, I shall say, first of all, that *a sense of unworthiness is very desirable and commendable;* but, secondly, that *a sense of unworthiness can be very wrongly used,* and can even be made the occasion of grave sin: and then, thirdly, I shall add that *a sense of unworthiness finds a fit companion in a strong faith in Christ.* Of this the text supplies us with an instance. May the Holy Spirit help our meditations, and make them truly profitable!

I. First, then, A SENSE OF UNWORTHINESS IS VERY DESIRABLE AND COMMENDABLE. Some of you are destitute of it. I dare say you think it a mean and miserable thing. You suppose it would injure your manliness, lower your self-respect, and damp your courage. Dear friends, the manliness which feeds on sin is a poisonous fungus, which grows out of the rottenness of a corrupt heart. May it be taken away from us! Any condition of mind which is founded on a falsehood must be an evil one: it is a bubble blown by ignorant conceit. Let us not desire more self-respect, manliness, or courage than will be consistent with the truth of things.

I commend a sense of our unworthiness because *it is a sense of what is true.* When a man thinks himself unworthy before the Lord, his thoughts are right. When he feels that he could not be saved by the merit of his own works, for his works are faulty and defiled, then he judges according to fact. Whatever result a thought may have upon us, whether it makes us happy or makes us sad, this is a secondary matter; the main point with an honest mind must always be —Is it true? If it be a truthful thought, I ought at once to entertain it, cost me what it may. Should the truth create devastation within my soul, and destroy all my fair hopes and promising fancies, it must be so; for the most painful effect of truth is better for me than the most flattering results of falsehood. Better the smitings of truth than the kisses of deceit. The arrow which pierces the heart of self-conceit is a blessing. If you take a very lowly view of yourself, some may call you morbid; but they know not what spirit you are of. Humility is healthy: lowliness is no disease. When we think worse and worse of ourselves, we are getting nearer and nearer to the truth. We are by nature depraved, degraded, guilty, and worthy of the wrath of God. If any hard thing can be imagined against fallen man, it is assuredly true of him. What worse character can be given to human nature than that which is drawn by the pen of inspiration in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans! Oh, that God would make us lowly in spirit, and fill us with a deep feeling of our own unworthiness! for this will only be revealing to us the truth, and delivering us from the way of falsehood.

In the next place, note that *a deep sense of unworthiness is no proof that a man has grossly sinned.* It may be viewed in quite the opposite light: if the man had been heinously wicked, his conscience would have lost its sensitiveness, and he would not in all probability have felt his unworthiness so keenly. He that hath high thoughts of himself is not necessarily a man of clean life; and on the other hand he that hath very depreciatory thoughts of himself is not thereby proven to be worse than others. He that feels himself unworthy hath something about him that God esteems. We are sure of this; for when the Lord seeks a lodging among men, though he might have his choice of palaces, he nevertheless deigns to say, "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Do not judge men by their estimates of themselves; or if you do, take this as your guide, that he that humbleth himself is to be exalted, and he that exalteth himself is to be abased. He that is great, is little: let him that is little to himself be all the greater with you. God loveth not those who boast: he hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he hath sent empty away.

I commend this sense of unworthiness, because *it has a tendency to make a man kind to others.* He who thinks himself everybody thinks another man nobody. Pride hath no bowels, and will rather turn a sick servant out of doors than seek a physician for him. If a man be proud, he will say, "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I am not to be worried by having sick boys to look after." Sympathy, tenderness, and the valuation of others are strangers in the

house of the proud; but they take up their abode with those who think themselves unworthy. Beloved, it is well to think little of yourselves, for then you will have more thought to spare for the sorrows of others. If you know yourself to be unworthy, you will cheerfully recognize the claims of others; and will feel that it is not beneath you to care for the poorest and most obscure. There is some trace of a work of grace in your heart, when you have a love to your neighbour because you feel that you are no better than he. This is infinitely better than to be so great that you can trample down the crowd in your imperial and imperious dignity, and look down with contempt upon the many who have not attained to that eminent degree of honour which you suppose yourself to be enjoying. The great man, the very great man, the highly-deserving man, the person who is a right honourable and worshipful personage, rides roughshod over his fellows and crushes them without compunction, if they lie in his way and may hinder his design; but the consciously unworthy man, the man who feels that he owes everything to the mercy of God, and must still depend upon that mercy and that mercy only, will be tender and gentle towards his fellow-sinners, and speak comfortably unto them.

We commend again this sense of unworthiness, because *it makes a man lowly towards the Saviour*. Of all things that are contemptible, a proud bearing towards the Lord Jesus is the most hateful; yet it is by no means unusual. Some seem to fancy that Jesus is their servant, at their beck and call; and they talk about his salvation as though he ought to give it, and they could claim it for themselves and all mankind. If we speak about the sovereign choice of some unto eternal life, they begin chattering about injustice and partiality: as if any guilty man had a right to anything from the Lord of glory, except the dreadful right to be punished for his sins. I think I hear the Master say, "May I not do as I will with my own?" Many of those who pretend to be the advocates of grace, are the betrayers of it, and snatch from its hand the silver sceptre of its sovereignty. Beloved, it is well in prayer to come to our Lord, not as creditors seeking a debt, but as condemned criminals, begging for a free pardon. We have no claim on God. If he chooses to save us, it must be of his own free grace. Let us come humbly, saying, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof. That thou shouldest die for me remains the greatest of all miracles in my esteem. That thou shouldest choose me, and call me, and pardon me, and save me, is a world of wonders, at which my soul stands gratefully amazed. Whence is this to me? How couldest thou look on such a dead dog as I am!" Our right state of heart, when dealing with our Lord Jesus, is that of the penitent washing his feet with tears, or of the leper who fell at his feet and worshipped him. If we would come to the Saviour of sinners, we must come as sinners. We must come as humble petitioners, and not as those who proudly fancy that they have a claim upon the grace of God.

A sense of unworthiness is exceedingly useful, because *it puts a man where God can bless him*. "Oh," say you, "where is that?" The Lord will only act in conformity with his own attributes. God will always be God; and as he will be God alone in creation, so he will

certainly be God alone in the new creation. Our only right position before God is to know that we are undeserving and unworthy while he is holy and glorious. We must hear him say, "I am God, and beside me there is none else," or we shall never look unto him to be saved. If I am somebody, and I stand up with my rights and my claims, God cannot bless me without conceding to me that which he never will concede. How dare I claim that which he calls a free gift? How often have I made this place ring with that voice of the Lord, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion"! Depend upon it, God will be God; and if you will not be saved without his leaving the throne of his sovereignty, then you will perish without hope. He will be King and Lord in the work of salvation; you must take it as his free gift, or die without it. If it be of grace it cannot be of right—the things are contradictory. Unutterably great is his pity, immeasurable is his mercy; but still he will have no pity for those whose proud self-will stands out against his sovereign grace. O sinner, if you would be pardoned, you must confess that the Lord is King. Your touch of Jesus himself must be like that of Thomas when he put his finger to the wound, and cried, "My Lord, and my God"! You must have Jesus to be Lord and God to you, or he will be nothing to you. Beloved, no man will yield to this till he has a thorough conviction of his own unworthiness. We are not worthy to be saved; if we were, it would be of debt, and not of grace. We are not worthy to receive any good from the hand of an offended God; if we were, we should make our appeal to justice, and mercy would not be needed. Come, dear hearers, let us bow before the Lord, and own that he alone is King. Let us confess that we deserve nothing but his wrath.

> "If sudden vengeance seize my breath,
> I must pronounce thee just in death;
> And if my soul were sent to hell,
> Thy righteous law approves it well."

It is assuredly so, and therefore we put in no claim, but simply cry, "O God, be merciful to me."

This state of mind, once more, *makes a man in love with the simple Word of God.* This man, because he was not worthy, did not ask of Christ any mystic words or imposing ceremonies, nor even so much as a visit to his house. No, he was content that the Lord should speak the word. It is our proud human nature that so much sighs for finery and pomp: we would fain go to heaven by some royal road, or glittering way; we want to be saved to music, and perfected by paraphernalia. We would like to be forgiven; but we must needs have a visible priest in full canonicals; and we must have a decorated altar and a show of candles in the daylight. Gewgaws are wanted to conceal the humiliation of being saved by pure grace. But a soul that feels its own unworthiness cries, "Lord, save me in thine own way. Thy word is enough for me. Speak the word of command, and it suffices me." We read, "He sent his word, and healed them"; and a sense of unworthiness will make us content to be saved in that most simple manner. Humble souls love a plain gospel. I know what some

are: they read a book which contains the gospel, and because it is very simple, they say, "This will do for my servant-girl, or for the labourer in my field"; but for themselves they seek something more hard to understand, and consequently more flattering to their pride. Many people like a preacher who can confound the gospel for them: plain speech offends them. We are overdone with such folk in this generation. Certain people, when they hear what they cannot comprehend, say fervently, "What a wonderful discourse! I delight in a man of culture, who raises the tone of preaching above what the lower classes can understand." Fools that they are to talk so! The plainer the Word, the more likely it is to be the word of God. Did not Paul say, "Seeing we have received this ministry, we use great plainness of speech"? The gospel is not sent into the world for the *élite*, for the few choice souls that read the reviews. The gospel is sent into the world for "every creature"; and if it be meant for "every creature," it must be made so plain that even non-readers may be able to comprehend it, and persons with the slenderest education, or none at all, may be able to grasp it. You, learned sir, may like a highly-finished gospel, which only a half-dozen gentlemen like yourself can comprehend; but I like the common salvation, the good news for the crowd, the writing which he that runneth can read. Does not your candour and humanity admit that it is well that the gospel should be simple enough for the poor and the illiterate, since they need salvation as well as the educated? I would to God that a sense of unworthiness brought us all down from those pinnacles of the temple of vanity, where we stand in mutual admiration, but in awful danger of a fall. Oh, that the heavenly wisdom would make us willing to be saved like common-place sinners, willing for Christ not to come to our house, but to give the word of command by which the miracle of grace would be wrought!

Now, beloved friends, I leave that point, only putting it thus—Do you know your own unworthiness? I do not ask you whether you have been racked with terrors, nor whether you have been tormented with doubts, nor whether you have been drowned in despair—that may be, or may not be. But are you willing to subscribe to this, that you are not worthy, that sentence of condemnation may fitly be passed upon you, and if you are saved it must be of free grace alone?

II. But now, secondly, I have to show you that THIS SENSE OF UNWORTHINESS CAN BE WRONGLY USED, and is often perverted to ruinous ends.

Yonder is a person who cries, "I hear the gospel, but *I cannot believe that it is intended for me.* I cannot think I am aimed at in the proclamation of free forgiveness and gracious acceptance." Friend, why not? "Well, I am unworthy." Listen! Is there a man on earth who is not unworthy? Hear ye the words of Jesus: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." We are not sent to every worthy creature, but to "every creature," worthy or unworthy. Are you not a creature? Well, then, the gospel is to be preached to you. And do you think God means it to be preached to you as a mere form, or a grim farce? Has it no relation to you? Your believing, and being baptized

according to the divine command, will God say, "I never meant that promise for you? It is atrocious that you should think so. It is a new and grievous sin to imagine that the Lord would run back from his word. You are unworthy; we grant it; but does that make God false? You are unworthy, more unworthy than you know of; but does that prove the Lord to be untrue? Will he tantalize men by sending them a gospel which is not intended for them? Will he put salvation before them, and bid them believe in Jesus for it, when he never means to give it to them if they do comply with the conditions he has laid down? Come, come! I will go with you as far as you like in your confession of your own unworthiness; but I cannot tolerate your making God unworthy because you are unworthy. He will keep his word, however false you may be, and every soul that believeth in Christ Jesus hath everlasting life.

I have seen this same evil come up in the form of *doubt as to the mercy of God.* When a man's sin appears very great, he is apt to say, "God cannot have mercy upon me." Now, sir, you shall be allowed to be the chief of sinners, if you feel yourself to be so; but you cannot be allowed to deny the omnipotence of God. You are sadly unworthy; but it is in the unworthy that grace finds its sphere of operation, and you must not limit the power of that grace which comes to men through Christ Jesus. The Lord delighteth in mercy, and do you doubt it? Do you dare to say that he cannot have mercy on whom he will have mercy? Why, that denies the whole body of Scripture, throughout which he declares to us that "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." He testifies that "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Do you deny this? He puts it expressly "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." You know these promises; will you give them the lie, and so make God a liar? Your unworthiness must not be allowed to be used as an argument for the denial of God's glorious attribute of mercy. Doth he not say—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon?" Which is true, you or God? Depend upon it the lie is not with him. Oh, let it not be with you; but now, even now, believe that his mercy endureth for ever, and that where sin abounded grace did much more abound.

Poor creatures have even gone the length of *doubting the power of the blood of Jesus to cleanse them.* If you talk so, I must put my hand on your mouth; you must not say another word of that sort. Is it not enough that you have bespattered yourself with sin? Must you now asperse your Saviour? Will you trample on the blood of Christ? Will you deny its cleansing power? As he was God as well as man, our Lord's sacrifice has an infinite virtue in it, and we cannot endure that you, guilty as you are, should add to all your former crimes this highest and most ungenerous iniquity of charging the blood of Christ with a want of cleansing power. Will you give God the lie about his own Son? O sirs, if you perish it will not be because the blood has too little efficacy, it will be because you have not believed on the name

of the Son of God, and will not come unto him that you might have life.

We have known persons under deep distress *doubt the promise of God.* A great and sure promise, which obviously belonged to them, they have set aside, saying, "It is too good to be true. I cannot believe it, because I am so unworthy." Again I follow the same mode of reply: *you* may be a liar, but do not make God one. You may have made many promises which you have broken, but do not charge God with doing so. You have vowed that you would do this and that, and you have forgotten your pledges and thrown your promises into forgetfulness; but dream not that God will do so. He is not a man that he should lie. O man, I pray you, if you feel as if you were on the brink of hell, yet do not doubt God's faithfulness to his promise; do not cast a doubt upon his truthfulness: that would be a superfluity of naughtiness. I feel sometimes that, even if I were lost, I must still believe God to be true. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Here, put the killing sword to my bare neck, and let me die the death I deserve, but I will still believe that God is good and true. O Jehovah, thou dost keep thy word! Such faith is not one jot greater than the Lord deserves of us; for he has never deceived us, and he never will. Dear heart, do take the promise of God to mean what it says, and believe it. Suppose somebody were to trust himself with Christ for salvation, and were to believe God would therefore save him, and yet he should not be saved; what then? I will not suppose such a case; but I will wait till you find me an actual instance, and then I will consider how to answer you. Why, if a soul that trusted in the promise of God, and fled to Christ for refuge, could be sent down to hell, the legions of the infernal pit would exhibit him as a trophy of their victory over God. They would carry him on their shoulders, and shout, "Here is a proof that God can lie. Here is a proof that Christ's blood has failed to save a believer. Here is a sinner that trusted God, and, after all, was lost in the teeth of God's covenant and oath!" Do you think that such a thing will ever happen? Let not such a blasphemous idea be tolerated in your mind for a moment. Take the promise as coming from God, and therefore as assuredly true; simply believe it, and be happy.

Some, because they are unworthy, *would deny the Lord Jesus the pleasure of saving them.* When Cato committed suicide, Cæsar was sad that Cato should envy him the glory of saving his life. Perhaps if Cato had known what Cæsar would have said, he had not been so swift with his sword. Beloved, will you deny Christ the pleasure of forgiving you? Will you go to hell that you may spite the Saviour by not suffering him to save you? Will you look the eternal Father in the face and express a hate so malignant that you venture to say, "I will rather be condemned for ever than be saved by the grace of God?" I cannot believe it. Surely you are not such a madman! Come, come, man! I will let thee use the blackest language about thyself: thou mayest paint thyself as almost a fiend, and little better than the devil, if this will please thee; thou shalt sweep up hell itself for epithets, if thou wilt, wherewith to set forth thine own sin and misery; but, I pray thee, touch not God, deny not his

mercy, doubt not his faithfulness, refuse not his love, but submit thyself to his saving grace. Remember how the Syrian messengers diligently observed whether anything would come from the King of Israel; and when Ahab said, "He is my brother," they did "hastily catch at it," and they said, "Thy brother Ben-hadad." Oh, that you would hastily catch at the word of grace, for one word may be enough to bring you consolation! Remember how the Ninevites, when Jonah preached to them, repented on the bare hope of "Who can tell?" They had not a word of promise to back them up in their confidence, but they ventured upon "Who can tell but God may turn from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" Come, dear heart, catch at the smallest hopeful thing. Have a trap for sunbeams as well as for hailstones. Take fast hold upon the sweet words which God has said, believe them to be true, and risk all upon them. You will never believe better of God than thou shalt find him to be.

Alas! there are some whose sense of unworthiness *turns to sullen rebellion*. I will not speak harshly of them; but I do know some few who frequent these courts, of whom I must say that they are their own jailors and tormenters. Like one of old, they must confess, "My soul refused to be comforted." There is another passage in the psalm, which says, "Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat." Who were these? David says they were fools. I do not say so much as that, dear friends, of any of you; but I am solemnly afraid it would be true, if I did say it. He that refuses all manner of meat is like to be starved; and who is to be blamed for it? If you refuse the bread of life, can we pity you if you die of hunger? To put from you the one and only salvation out of sullen hopelessness is as suicidal as if you stabbed yourself. Will you do so? Will you cry out, "I shall be lost; I know I shall. It is of no use preaching to me; it is of no use praying for me!" My dear friend, are you really going to give yourself up in such an absurd way, while you are yet in the land of hope? Here you sit in the dungeon, and I stand before you with a free pardon: will you not have it? It is to be had for the asking; will you not ask for it? It is to be had by the willing receiver; will you not receive it? Then I solemnly tell you that if you remain obstinate, there will soon be the rope about your neck, and you will reap the due reward of your sin and folly. What! You still cry you are so unworthy! We know you are: yet a free pardon is granted you if you will accept it. "Oh, but I feel my unworthiness so terribly!" Would a man be hanged out of spite to the clemency of our gracious Queen? Would he choose to be executed because he felt unworthy to be pardoned? Will you be lost because you do not feel worthy to be saved? Man alive, if I were you, I would say nothing against the grace which would save me, but I would gratefully accept the loving pardon and the tender mercy of my Lord. I feel that it is no business of mine to plead for my own damnation. The devil and I have had many a skirmish; and if there is anything to be said against my being saved, I have no doubt whatever that he will be particularly sure to say it. Therefore I do not go into that line of business: there is no room for me; Satan will do all that can be done in that

direction. I find it far more profitable to be picking up all the crumbs of comfort I can find, in the form of reasons why I should be saved. In reading the Word of God I find these reasons are as plentiful as blackberries in autumn. God hath said it, and I believe it—"He that believeth on him hath everlasting life." I believe in Jesus, and I have everlasting life. [Here came a shout of "Hallelujah!" "Bless the Lord!"] Yes, we can all of us join in that shout, and bless God for his free love which has abounded towards us, which love we have seen and known, and tasted, and handled. Well might we all join in one long hallelujah, and make the streets ring with—"Blessed be the name of the Lord." But the poor folk I am thinking of sit down, and bite their nails, and chew their lips, and weep their eyes away, and never move an inch towards the one blessing which they need above all things. Let me warn such. Remember, a man may commit suicide as truly by refusing to eat as by taking poison; and you may destroy your own souls by refusing Christ quite as surely and guiltily as if you plunged into open rebellion against the Lord God, and ran to an excess of riot. Think of this, I pray you.

III. But now, thirdly—and I am glad to proceed to this much more pleasing subject—A SENSE OF UNWORTHINESS FINDS A FIT COMPANION IN STRONG FAITH IN CHRIST.

For, look you, first, *when you have no faith in yourself, there is the more room in the soul for faith in Jesus.* If you have confidence in yourself, that bit of self is filled; but if you have no confidence in yourself, your soul is one great vacuum, and you can hold the more of Christ. The greater the emptiness, the more room for that which is to be the fulness. If thou hast no reason whatever why thou shouldest be saved, except the free grace of God in Christ, then take that free grace here, and now. God help thee so to do, and may nothing hinder thee! Believe the more in Christ, because thou canst not, in any degree, believe in thyself.

Again, he that has low thoughts of himself, *is on a vantage ground as to receiving saving truth.* He who has true views of himself, is likely also to discover the truth with regard to the Lord Jesus and the covenant blessings which come to us in him. Everything depends, you know, upon the measure with which we calculate. If your yard is too short, or too long, everything will be inaccurate in proportion to the faultiness of your standard of measurement. When you have the right measure as to your own lost, ruined, and undone condition, you will soon receive the right measure as to the grace and ability of the Son of God, who is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him. Jesus is an almighty Saviour: there is no horrible crime, no unmentionable offence, no damnable sin, which he cannot forgive. There is no criminality or baseness of character which he cannot overcome and remove, "All power is given unto him," and in the salvation realm he is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and nothing can resist his sway. Believest thou this? If so, trust thyself to him now, and the moment thou dost it thou wilt pass from death unto life.

This man, again, through his being so lowly, *had not the conceit to question and doubt.* Doubt is, in most cases, the daughter of pride. Think of a man criticizing God! Job might possibly have done

that while he heard of God by the hearing of the ear; but when his eye saw him he abhorred himself in dust and ashes. How dare we cavil at God's way of saving the guilty! It is impertinence! It is insanity! Let us have none of it.

This lowly estimate of himself brought the centurion *away from dictating to Jesus how the blessing should come.* A great many persons we meet with are always mapping out courses for the Holy Spirit. They are willing to be saved if they can be saved by a certain mode. They will believe if they see signs and wonders, but not else. Their peace must come in the way they have selected, and in no other: their mind is made up as to how it ought to be. The centurion might have said, "Lord, come under my roof, and then I will believe. The token of thy presence shall make me sure." He did not ask for signs, or wonders, or comforts. Lots of you here are waiting till you feel some singular feeling, or see some strange vision, or undergo a special experience; you cannot believe Christ's bare word: you are too proud to be saved by that only. O my hearers, if the Lord shows you your utter unworthiness you will be willing to be saved in the simplest manner. You will then ask nothing but this one thing, "Lord, save, or I perish." If Christ had come to the centurion's house, he would have had a very remarkable experience; it would be strange for a Roman soldier to entertain the Saviour of the world; but he did not ask for that remarkable experience and peculiar honour. You read biographies, or you hear Christian people tell how they were saved, and you put your finger on certain memorable points, and you say, "If ever I feel that, or see that, I will believe in Christ; but not else." Thus it seems that the Lord must bow to your will, and not do as he thinks fit. Truly, the wind bloweth where it listeth, and none of our dictation will have weight with the free Spirit or with the sovereign Saviour.

If Christ had come to the man's house, there would have been great joy in it; but he did not ask for that joy. Some will not believe in the Lord Jesus, unless they feel great transports; but, dear friend, is it right to resolve that if you feel no joy, you will not believe in him? Nay, rather, if you walk in darkness, and see no light, trust in the Lord. If all within seems to be contrary to the fact of your salvation, believe you in Christ, and you are saved: and if every power and passion of your nature should vote you lost, you are not lost if you are simply hanging to the bare word of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This man was so brought down that *he was content with just a word.* "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." This is the point to come to. Are you content to believe God's bare word, and to be saved by God's word alone? You would believe at once if I could work you a miracle, would you not? What would you believe? You would believe in me; and as I do not want you to believe in me, but in Christ, I will not work any miracle. Oh, but if you could feel some very singular emotion, you would believe. What would you believe in? Why, in the singular emotion, that is all. You would not believe in God's Word. He that cannot believe God's Word without wonders, really fixes his belief in the wonders, and not in God's Word. Take the naked word of God, which is this—"Believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." What though you neither sigh nor sing, though you neither have dream nor doubt, though you have neither great comfort nor sharp conviction, believe in Jesus! Sinful, unworthy as thou art, say, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire. I accept the Lord Jesus as my all in all!"

And after all, *such faith is the greatest of faith*, for the Lord Jesus said, "I have not found such faith, no not in Israel." One man stands up, and tells you the ground of his confidence, and you learn that at such a time he heard a voice, or in such a night he dreamed such a dream, or during certain months he had an awful experience of fear of hell, or at another period he felt such joy that he was carried clean away. Do not think less of the believer who says, "My experience is only this:—

> 'I'm a poor sinner, and nothing at all,
> But Jesus Christ is my all in all.'"

This last man's experience has least of dross about it. I find written in the infallible Book that if I trust the Lord Jesus he will perform his office of Saviour upon me. I have trusted him, and he has saved me. "Is that all the witness you have?" says one. What more witness do I want? I may be able to mention certain incidents which attended my conversion; but these are not my hope. I place no reliance upon what I have thought, or seen, or felt. If anybody could prove that I never saw, and never felt, and never heard anything of the kind, I should not be troubled about it, for one thing I know—I know that I heard that text, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;" and I did look, and I was saved. What is more, if I did not *then* look, and was not *then* saved, I do not care twopence to contest the point, for I am looking *now*, and therefore I am saved. That is the comfort: we have not to rely on a past faith, but still to go on believing. Looking unto Jesus ever; coming to him always: that is the true position for peace. If I rest in Christ every day, the fruit of that believing will be seen every day. I must not only believe in Jesus, but keep right on believing. God help you so to do! Set side by side with a deep sense of unworthiness a high appreciation of the power of Christ to cleanse you from sin, and to make you holy, even as God is holy. Make progress in these two things. They will not be like the legs of the lame, which are not equal; but they will be much alike in their happy effect upon your life. Down with self, and up with Christ.

> "Thus while I sink my joys shall rise
> Immeasurably high."

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew viii. 1—13; Luke vii. 1—10.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—100 (Vers. II.), 597, 556.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

AND WHY NOT ME?

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 7TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."—Matthew viii. 2, 3.

MATTHEW has placed this miracle immediately after the sermon on the mount. In all probability some little time intervened, in which our Lord had preached at Capernaum, and had also healed the people in the street, as we read just now in the first chapter of Mark. It was not the object of Matthew to arrange his facts precisely in the order of time; he had another end in view. After the sermon on the mount, he gives us remarkable miracles, as if to teach us that *our Lord's words were confirmed by his works.* Our Lord was mighty both in word and deed. His kingdom comes not only with truth, but with power. He wrought miracles that men might see with their eyes that the power of God was upon him, and might know that he spake with divine authority. At this day, beloved, it is even so. Power goes forth with the preaching of the gospel. The words of the Lord Jesus are spirit and life; they are in themselves full of authority, and we ought to accept them with ready faith; but since we are slow to believe, the Lord continues to work as well as speak; the "signs following" are still to be perceived—blind eyes are opened, deaf ears are unstopped, hearts of stone are turned to flesh, and the dead in sin are quickened. Conversion by grace follows the proclamation of the doctrines of grace; for the word is with power. Beloved, we have beheld wonders of regenerating power in our own midst, and therefore we are bound to believe in Jesus more and more. Blessed be the divine power which confirms the word! Jesus is never known in the full authority of his word until the Holy Spirit makes us feel the glory of his work within our hearts. We have the word, and we pray for more of the work. The Lord speaks to us graciously in the gospel ministry. Oh, that he would now work with us also to his own glory!

When our Lord spake, *his words were winged in such a way that they flew far afield.* He was heard, not only by the nearer company of his disciples, and by a great multitude who gathered about him, but

his words were carried home by the people as they returned to their cottages among the hills, or to their dwellings by the sea. They flew abroad as doves whose wings were covered with silver, and they lighted in strange places. His words had so much pungency about them that they could not be forgotten; they had so much of force in them that they wrought mightily on the minds of men, and were repeated by those who heard them. Among the rest, the words of the Lord Jesus came to a poor leper, who dwelt alone outside a city wall. We know little about him; even his name is not mentioned, but to him also the glad tidings of a Saviour came. He spent much of his time in solitude, or in begging; for he could not follow the pursuits of men, nor earn his bread like other men. The disease of despair was upon him, and none could help him in his trouble. He had heard of Jesus, and, perhaps, on the edge of the crowd, had heard him speak. He felt that there was something divine about the preacher who spake as never man spake: this aroused hope within him: he came to Jesus, and was healed. What was his name, or his descent, or previous history, we do not know. He ranks among the notable anonymous of earth, whose names are written in heaven. No one among you knows where God's word will fly this day: it may be blessed to some outcast in the bush, who will read it, and find mercy of the Lord. Our congregation is a singular one, made up of persons of every condition of life, from almost every country under heaven; and in it there are specialities of character unknown to the preacher; but the Lord can bless all who hear it. God has brought them hither; and since the word that shall be spoken is a repetition of Christ's own Word, and is the same gospel which Jesus preached, we expect that it will fly far and wide, and will call many a sin-sick soul to the great Physician's feet. The Lord grant it!

As I have often preached upon this leper, you are well acquainted with the story, and must almost wonder that I should speak upon it again. I do so that I may dwell upon one single point of it, which I trust may encourage souls to come to Jesus. I have a burning thirst upon me for the salvation of souls; where is the man or woman who will give me to drink, by coming to my Lord? Note the special object of observation—"Behold, there came a leper." Upon this I have to say, in the first place, that *he came of himself;* secondly, that *he came by himself*, having no comrade to cheer him in the venture; and thirdly, that *he was in himself rewarded for coming.*

I. First, then—and this is the main point of this morning's discourse—HE CAME OF HIMSELF. Read in Scripture concerning the miracles of Christ, and you will be struck with the way in which many were *led* to him. A friendly hand conducted the blind, or conducted the little children. Some were bodily *brought* to Christ. We read of a paralyzed man who was "borne of four," and they let him down by ropes through the ceiling to the place where Jesus stood. Others could not come or be brought, but the Lord went to them where they were, on their beds, or waiting at the pool. But here is a case of a man who came by himself, on his own account; and I want you to note this, because I am persuaded that we have around us those who have nobody to lead them to Christ, nobody to pray for them, nobody

to persuade, exhort, or entreat them; but these may come through the direct operations of the Spirit upon their souls. These are left outside the pale, dwelling on the other side of the line of Christian effort; but they are not beyond the grace of God. This leper did come of himself; though none called him, he plucked up courage, and it is written as a wonder, "Behold, there came a leper and worshipped him."

Note well that this man *knew in himself that his case was a terrible one.* I do not intend to describe the dreadful disease of leprosy; we have, on other occasions, viewed it as God's appointed picture of sin. It was a living death, a source of misery, a centre of defilement: and such is sin. Medical men are not clear as to whether the leprosy was ordinarily infectious. It is now believed that it is contagious to a certain degree; but there was no pressing sanitary reason why lepers should have been shut out from all society. The Lord, who intended leprosy, under the old theocracy, to be the picture of sin, ordained that, when once a man was a leper, he should be regarded as unclean in himself, and so polluting that every person and thing that he touched became unclean. Hence the leper was dreaded in his every approach to his fellows. He was looked upon as dead while he lived, and his case was viewed as beyond human help. Remember how the king of Israel cried out, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" If a leper did recover it was regarded as a making alive, a resurrection from death. This man knew, even better than anybody else, in what a wretched and loathsome state he was. His disease was ever before him. Leprosy is awful to look upon: what must it be to feel? Leprosy is terrible in description; what must it be in actual endurance? He knew that now at length he had come to the last stage of his malady; for Luke describes him as "full of leprosy"; he had come to the final stage, and the disease was conspicuous upon him. His skin was foul, and his joints were rotting. Very likely his fingers, his teeth, and hair were gone, and soon he must die. Such was the mass of moving death of which we read, "Behold, there came a leper to him." He was not kept back by the fact that he was hopelessly and loathsomely diseased.

Let us learn the lesson well. I earnestly pray that some poor guilty one, conscious of sin, horrified at himself, may now venture to come to Jesus. Though he feels the foul disease within him, and fears that it has come to its worst, yet may he be emboldened to approach to him who can at once make him clean. If you feel yourself to be a mass of loathsomeness and corruption, or, worse still, hardened and insensible in conscience, yet come to Jesus for healing. Even though you are truly described in our hymn as "self-abhorred," yet come to him, who will not abhor you. Come at once, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Let desperate cases come: let hopeless cases come. I am imploring the Lord to let it be so. O my brethren in the Lord, I entreat you, plead with me!

Next, note with regard to this man, that *others gave him up as hopeless.* Persons hurried past him if he stood near the city gate. He was bound himself to warn them off by crying, "Unclean, unclean."

To him the sweets of friendship and all the comforts of domestic life were unknown: he was a cast-off and a castaway. The rulers of his people had looked upon him, and pronounced him unclean, and therefore he was banished from among men. Is there such a one before me? Do your relatives shun you? Do people in decent society avoid you? Oh, that you had grace and faith, to come to Jesus just as you are, and fall at his feet and worship him; for, rest assured, he can make you clean, and give you a name and a place among his people. The hopeless are the very people that Jesus loves to save.

No one could or would take him to Jesus. He was too foul to be touched, too far gone to be the subject of hope. Here and there we meet with persons who have so often disappointed their friends, that it is small wonder that they now keep them at a distance. Even an affectionate mother has said, "We have tried him many times, sir, but it is of no use. We cannot help him any more, for he has drained the family." The father almost prays to forget the prodigal, and the elder brother wishes never to see him again. It is a hard case when it comes to that: but such hard cases there are. The world has in it men of whom society is sick. The profligate has been to this charitable person, and to the other benevolent individual, until everyone is weary of the ne'er-do-well, and no one feels that he could associate with him without becoming himself suspected of vice. By common consent he is judged to be unfit for a reformatory, but well worthy of a prison. No one reasons with him, entreats him, or prays for him. He floats over the ocean of life as an abandoned wreck. He has turned infidel lately, and even his loving sister, who used to plead with him with the tears in her eyes, now shudders when he comes near, because his language has grown so sarcastic and blasphemous that the dear girl cannot bear it. Now that no man careth for your soul, how earnestly do I wish that you would care for it yourself! Oh, that you would form the singular and saving resolve that you will go to the Lord Jesus on your own account, and so frustrate all the evil prophecies which have been uttered concerning you! Why will you perish? Poor soul! why will you die? If there be such a person now before me, I pray from the bottom of my soul that he or she may now, with fixed determination, come to Jesus. O ye angels, may ye now have cause to cry out again, "Behold, there came a leper and worshipped him!" There is one hand which would fain lead you to Jesus—I stretch it out to you this morning. There is yet one heart that would plead with you to seek salvation; and if there be not another in the world, yet come along with you, come just as you are, and show your misery to the Lord of mercy. Men have written out your death-warrant; but the Lord Jesus has not signed it, and therefore it cannot be executed. They call you a castaway; but the Lord gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. His longsuffering in sparing your life means your salvation.

> "While the lamp holds out to burn,
> The vilest sinner may return."

Come, then, with all your sin about you, repent of your transgressions, and believe in Jesus, and thou shalt be clean.

In this man's case *there was no precedent to encourage him.* I do not find that our Lord had healed a leper up to that time. I do not think there was a case of the sort. Many diseases he had dealt with; but the Blessed One had not yet encountered "a man full of leprosy." When there are plenty of precedents, there is a kind of paved way for us to travel; but this man had to make his own track. We can reason —"My father and my brother came to Jesus, and were saved; why should not I?" This man could use no such argument. I wonder whether the poor creature had heard what Jesus said in the synagogue at Capernaum—it could not have been long before—"Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian." I wonder whether he drew any kind of comfort from that utterance; perhaps not. In any case, he must boldly lead the way, and be the first leper that came to Jesus. O my hearer, if never such a sinner as you are has been saved, make bold to lead the way. Dare to approach the living Lord, who can make you clean; and do not despair, even though you may not have heard of another sinner of your sort that ever was forgiven.

As to the most of you, my dear hearers, you and the leper must part company on this point. He had no precedents; but you have very many. You know that Christ has saved sinners all around you. Some of you have at home a brother who was as bad as yourself; but he is now converted. You have heard your father tell how far he went astray, and yet the Lord brought him to himself. Many of us now present can assure you that, "This man receiveth sinners"; for he received *us.* We can witness, assuredly, that he is abundantly able to save; for he has manifested that power in our cases. With these precedents, wherein the Lord Jesus hath saved persons like yourself, come to him, I pray you, and prove that he is the same now as ever. Are you a drunkard? Many drunkards have been rescued from their degrading vice. Are you a thief? a liar? a Sabbath-breaker? Such were some of us; but we are washed and made clean. Yea, if you have been an adulterer, or a murderer—can I say worse?—"all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Men of the vilest sort have been saved; wherefore come to the Lord with confidence, even as this leper came, and put your trust in him.

Furthermore, *this man had no promise.* I do not find that Jesus ever said, "Come unto me, ye lepers, and I will heal you." I do not know that any of his apostles had been sent forth to preach, saying, "Come to Jesus, all ye lepers, and he will cleanse you." There was no promise to that effect, save that our Lord himself is a consolidated promise. The very fact of his being here below is a mountain range of promises to our fallen race. Without any verbal promise, this man came, and said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst." My dear hearers, I cannot say to any of you that you may not come to Jesus because there is no promise for you. Far from it. If there were no promise, I would exhort you to seek mercy as the Ninevites did, when they said, "Who can tell?" But the promises are plentiful as the stars. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Whoso confesseth

and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Will you not be drawn by these promises, and will you not come when such a word as this stands before you—"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"? The blessed doctrine of election does not hinder you, for all who come are elect. The sacred truth of the new birth does not bar you, for he that believeth is born again. I pray you, come and show yourself to the great Healer, and he will not turn you away.

Again, *this man had no invitation.* Our Lord had not called him; he had never said, "Come, ye lepers; come, and be healed." There was nobody to command or persuade him to come, nobody to cheer him in coming, much less any to compel him to come in. Of himself, constrained by a divine impulse unknown to anybody else, this leper resolved to come, and found himself welcome, though he had not been expressly bidden. To you, my dear hearers, I cannot say that you have no invitation; for we are always crying to you, Come, ye weary and heavy laden. Come, for Jesus calls. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely." The invitations of mercy are sent out on a broad scale, since we are bidden to "preach the gospel to every creature." "Whosoever will, let him come." Yea, they of the hedges and the highways are to be compelled to come in. What shall I say? If you are lost, it will not be for want of an invitation. If you turn your back on Christ, you shall not say in hell that you were not entreated to come to him. I implore you to come to Jesus even as this leper came, and I pray the Holy Spirit to make my entreaties effectual with you.

This leper was bold in coming to Jesus, because, having nobody to encourage him, *he must have felt himself abashed as a lone man in the midst of the multitude.* Well he might, for he had no right to be there. Does anybody this morning say, looking round on this great audience, "Here am I, a stranger to everybody; nobody knows me, and if they did, they would not associate with me? I am out of place among the people of God." Are you labouring under an awful sense of sin? Are you bowed down under your own unworthiness? Do you feel as one lost in a crowd? The crowd being there was nothing very remarkable; but the leper's coming to Jesus was a very notable fact, a scene worth looking at. Hence we see the word, "Behold!" He is coming! Yes, he dares to come. The crowd make way, and the leper falls at Jesus' feet and worships him, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Glory be to God, the leper is at the feet of Jesus, where infinite love and power are bending over him! O my friend, will not you make a dash for it at this moment? You need not rise up and make any manifest demonstration, but you can in spirit bow at the feet of our Lord. Oh, that the Spirit of God would move you to come to Jesus now! Never mind the crowd. You are put apart by your own feelings; your broken heart has driven you into a solitary condition. Now come to Jesus before the crowd disperses. Though angels will see it, and devils will see it, yet come. Oh, that I could cry—Behold! Here is a sinner who,

now, at once, and in this place, casts himself at Jesus' feet! Grant it, O God! O God the Holy Ghost, work it, and work it now, we pray thee, and unto the name of Jesus shall be glory evermore!

This is our first head: the leper came of himself, though no one aided or encouraged him.

II. Secondly, THE LEPER CAME BY HIMSELF. This is very unlike the case of the ten lepers, who came to Jesus in a company, concerning whom he asked the question, "Where are the nine?" It is easy to go where ten are going, but harder to go alone. There are many things which people readily do in company with others; but they would not venture upon them as separate individuals. My hearer, there is only one of you; and when that one feels himself to be loathsome and vile, it seems a daring thing for him to come to Jesus by himself. Yet I trust you will so come.

Here I would enlarge by observing, first, that no doubt *the leper thought out this matter by himself.* Being often alone, he meditated upon what he had heard concerning this great preacher, and he considered both his doctrine and his miracles, and drew his own conclusions. There is always hope for a man when he begins to think about the Lord Jesus: the worst of it is that so many hearers of the gospel put their thinking out, and do none of it at home. This man thought over the matter calmly, candidly, and hopefully; and drew from it a solid, manifest, and practical conclusion with reference to himself. He did not rest in a general theory about all the world, but he found out a truth which concerned himself.

Having done so, *he came to the conclusion that our Lord was omnipotent to heal.* Mark well that he came to this conclusion with regard to himself. Is it, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make *lepers* clean"? No, it was a far more personal conclusion. "If thou wilt, thou canst make ME clean." That was the crucial point. Jesus could save *him*, even him. Long ago I believed that Christ could save my brothers and sisters—I never had a doubt about that. I never doubted our Lord's power to save anybody until I thought of myself, and then there seemed to be just one case which his omnipotence did not cover. I did not see how Jesus was to save me. Singular as it may seem, when a man is under a sense of sin, he will not deny the omnipotent power of God's grace as to all the rest of mankind; but secretly he will shut himself out from the range of mercy. Strange cruelty to the self he loves so well. He thinks himself to be just over the border; just beyond the reach of grace. This man was not so foolish. He argued, "I am a leper. Yes; but God has healed lepers. I am a leper in the worst state, for I am full of leprosy; but with God all things are possible. This man is sent of God, and the power of God is with him; therefore I conclude that he can cleanse me if he will." It was well done of the leper. It is a fine thing to have come to such a rational and just conclusion. I wish every person here would come to that conclusion about his own soul. Though you must condemn yourself, though the harshest expression I could use would not slander you in your own esteem, yet it comes to this, thinking it all over—"Christ can save you if so he wills." You are not shut out by any word of Scripture, or by any lack of love or power on the part of the Saviour,

If you are worse than others, the infinite grace of God will be seen all the more in your salvation. Jesus can save you—even you.

Still thinking the subject over, *he saw where the matter hinged.* Everything depended on our Lord's will. Some say that the leper doubted the willingness of Christ: I greatly doubt this interpretation of his words. He simply stated a great truth. If Jesus only willed it, the leper could be made clean without his saying or doing anything. The whole work depended on the Lord's will that it should be done. His will was the spring of the healing power. Does anybody doubt this? In the work of salvation, certain preachers are continually insisting upon the freedom of the human will; truly with these I raise no quarrel: but I would have them equally insist upon the freedom of the divine will. Christ has a right to save whom he pleases; and though he saves all who trust him, this also is not without his will. He said to this man, "I will"; and there is no instance in Scripture of a suppliant for healing to whom he said, "I will *not*." Yet his saving grace lies under the control of his own sovereignty: he is no man's debtor, but he may do as he wills with his own. It is most certain that, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy." This man, in his lonely thoughts, had struck upon this golden nugget of truth. He saw that his hope lay in the will of Christ; and where could it lie better? I am afraid that in this matter he excelled some of you, for his own will was right enough; but I fear that, in the cases of some of you, your own will is not yet right with God. It goes without saying that the leper's will was in a right condition, and hence he appeals to Jesus. Is Jesus willing? There was no fear as to that matter. I want all seekers to know that your salvation can now be wrought by the will of Jesus. He has made you willing to receive, and he is assuredly willing to give. If you are saved, it will not be because you deserve it, but because he freely gives where he pleases, according to the royal bounty of his heart. This man had found out a grand truth when he saw that his healing depended upon the will of the Saviour.

Then *he submitted himself to that will with joyful hope.* He could not know of a certainty that he would be healed, for Jesus had not as yet spoken of healing leprosy; but he was positive that he could do it if he would. It is a great thing to believe in the omnipotence of Jesus in the matter of salvation. We have a great advantage over the leper, for we know that he wills to save all sinners who come to him. The leper set himself before Christ, and said, in effect, "Here am I. Thou seest what a wretched creature I am: no worse can ever come to thee: but yet, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. I leave my case with thee." He prayed intensely, but it was rather in dumb show than in words; but Jesus knew what he meant.

This was the man's practical conclusion from his lonely thinking, and *he expressed it before the Lord in words all his own.* In the few words he used he borrowed nothing from any book of prayers, or manual of devotion. He was, in fact, a man of his own order, standing apart from all others. The result of his private thoughts was a decided act, and a brave avowal of his faith in the omnipotence of Jesus.

He did homage to Jesus. He kneeled before him, and worshipped him. I believe that he did this with the full persuasion of his Deity; for I do not think he could have said, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," unless he had believed that Jesus was God. Our Saviour did not say, "Rise up: you must not worship me, for I am only a man, and to worship me would be sheer idolatry." No. Our Lord did not repudiate divine honours when they were offered to him by his followers; but he accepted them as a matter of right, since he counted it not robbery to be equal with God. This man trusted him whom he worshipped, and worshipped him whom he trusted. With reverent, humble, importunate prayer he set forth his case, and left it in the Saviour's hands. Oh, that my hearer would imitate him! I groan in spirit till this be so.

The leper came alone. He came not through persuading friends. I am afraid that some people join the church because other people press them to do so: this is a mistake. Some will say that they believe in Jesus, because it will give pleasure to earnest friends: this is mischievous. The leper was under no excitement; he was not the fungus of a revival, but the fruit of grace. He did not go into an inquiry-room, and see all the rest zealous about Jesus, and therefore become subject to a like feeling. No; he came alone, and came deliberately, and bowed himself at Jesus' feet. I want any here who are quite unused to religious influences, who have no mother to put her arms around their neck and pray for them, no friends to explain the things of God to them, nevertheless to come to Jesus. You need a Saviour; do you feel that you do? Though not accompanied by others, yet come to Jesus. Come alone, and by yourself. Come at once to Christ, and cast yourself at his feet. The thoughtful individual believer is often one of the best of converts; for he is most to be relied on. I like much those who are not imitators, but take their own course in coming to Jesus. Some are carried off their legs during a time of religious excitement, and think they are converted when they are not. Some profess faith because their brothers and sisters, and friends, are doing so; but it is not sufficiently an individual matter of heart with them. I set the leper before you as an example of the courage which comes to Jesus by itself, whether others will come, or forbear. I have kept to my one point hitherto, and I have all the while been praying the Lord to bring all my unconverted hearers to Jesus now.

III. I close by saying that THIS MAN HIMSELF WAS REWARDED FOR COMING.

Our Lord saw to it that he came not in vain. Poor soul! suffering as he was, and in dread of a terrible death, he no sooner began to come to Christ than *our Lord rewarded him with his sympathy.* He looked at him with a different look from what the leper had ever received before. When others glanced at the leper they went by as quickly as they could; and if some came face to him they turned away their eyes from the ghastly spectacle. Nobody pitied lepers in those days, for they judged them to be smitten of God. They were the objects of horror among men because they were viewed as objects of the wrath of the Most High. But when Jesus saw the afflicted

man, we read in Mark that "he was moved with compassion." I do not think I could fully interpret the Greek word into English. I could hardly pronounce it, since there is such a complication of consonants in it. Did you ever see a man overcome with emotion? His heart seems to swell, his bosom heaves, and tears burst forth. In our Lord's case his whole being was stirred. The depths of his spirit were agitated. He was moved—moved with a fellow-feeling. As soon as he saw the leper at his feet his very look said, "Alas, poor soul, what hast thou suffered! Into what a state of loathsomeness art thou brought! Thou art to men as a living dung-hill; but I do not despise thee, I love thee: I sympathize with thee." Now, my hearer, if you will come to Christ, that is how he will meet you. If you sorrow, he sorrows for you. If you loathe sin, he loathes it more than you do; but he has pity for the sinner. He is moved with compassion over your miserable state.

As the man came, his lone coming was *rewarded by our Lord touching him*. Nobody else would have touched this man. Peter, James, and John, and all the rest, would have drawn back their skirts, lest they should come into contact with a leper. As for the crowd, he had no difficulty in making his way, for they gave way before him, and had a ready gangway for himself. But now the Saviour touched him. There was something wonderfully cheering in that touch. I have heard of a lady who cared for poor crippled children. She found one which was so deformed, diseased, ill-humoured, and continually crying, that no one felt able to love it. She was nursing the child, but the task was no pleasure to her; for, do what she would, the poor child seemed always to cry, and always to act an unlovely part. The good woman pitied the child, but could not love it. As she had the poor creature in her lap, she dozed, and dreamed that Jesus came and bowed over her, and told her that, as to her soul, she also was sick and loathsome in his sight; but yet he loved her, and would manifest himself to her. When she came to herself, she looked at the poor, misshapen child, and again felt an aversion to it because it was so wretchedly deformed, so disgustingly full of sores, and so passionate and peevish. Under the power of the vision she had beheld, all her feeling of disgust went from her, she felt great tenderness of soul, she pressed the little one to her bosom, and kissed its poor, blotchy face. The child opened its eyes with wonder, for it had never been kissed before; and by that kiss a new world was opened to it. The little one became grateful, happy, patient, and was no longer a burden to those who cared for it. How much may come of a little! Even thus our Lord's personal touch of us heals us. His touch, in effect, said to the leper, "I do not loathe you: I will not keep away from you. I will come very near to you. I will bring a heavenly contagion to you, and, instead of your communicating disease, you shall receive of my health." Jesus Christ the Lord will come to you, poor seeker, and touch you, and prove himself to be your brother and your friend. Dear soul, if you will touch Jesus, he will touch you; if you believe in him he will manifest himself to you; and this morning, you, that saw no image but your leprous selves when you came here, shall go home seeing no image but the incarnate God glorified in saving you.

The Lord rewarded his submission with the sovereign word, "I will." As I have already told you, Jesus never says to a seeking soul, "I will not"; but if you cast yourself at his feet, and believe that he is able to save you, he will say, "I will." The "I will" of an emperor may have great power over his dominions; but the "I will" of Christ drives death and hell before him, conquers disease, removes despair, and floods the world with mercy. The Lord's "I will" can put away your leprosy of sin, and make you perfectly whole. Let there be no mistake about it—I mean you, my hearer, even you upon whom I look at this moment. To you is the word of this salvation sent.

As a reward to the man's faith, our Lord gave a cure; and, to increase the wonder, an immediate cure. "Immediately his leprosy was cleansed." How so great a change could be wrought we cannot tell. To dissect a miracle is absurd. Every part of the body had been long out of order, certain secretions had been poisoned, and certain vessels destroyed; and yet that one command, "Be thou clean," restored the leper's ruined frame, there and then. He that created can restore. Can God turn a sinner into a saint in a moment? He can. Niagara comes crashing down from the precipice of rock; could omnipotence reverse those floods, and make them leap upwards? God can do all things. In the moral world he is as mighty as in the outer universe. The heart is hard as adamant, or as the lower millstone; can he make it soft? Yes, in a moment he can make it tender as bleeding flesh. Believest thou this? If so, submit thyself to the divine energy, and ask that this be done unto thee. Only believe, without any sort of doubt, that Jesus is the incarnate God, and therefore has all power over human nature to pardon and to cleanse. Jesus can save thee, though thou stand between the open jaws of hell. Jesus can save thee, though thou be foulness itself, through lying asoak so long in the filthy lye of lust and unbelief. He can with a word make thee whiter than snow. Believest thou this? If thou believest this, I say, test it by submitting thyself to Jesus, that he may be a Saviour to thee. He will say, "I will; be thou clean."

Now to close. I have set the gate of mercy wide open, will you not enter? Oh, that the secret power of the Holy Spirit may gently incline you! By God's help, I have thrown out a big net, and I hope some of you will be entangled in its meshes. I travail in birth for you this day till you are born unto Jesus.

One thing we may say about this poor leper's case—he could not be any worse if he came to Jesus, and was refused; for already he was "full of leprosy." He could be no loser by his appeal to Jesus. And you, my hearer, if you will trust in Jesus, you can be no worse. You can but perish if you go to him. But, beloved, it is not possible for Jesus to repel a sinner who comes to him. He hath said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Though he be a leper, though he come without precedent, without promise, without invitation; yet if he does but come, the Lord can in no way or manner cast him out. The gospel cry is, "Come and welcome."

Jesus loves to see men in health. He takes no pleasure in disease and pain. It is a joy to him to cleanse and to make whole the souls

of men. Thou wilt be a happy man if Christ save thee; but Christ will have the bigger share of the happiness, since this was the joy that was set before him, for which he endured the cross, despising the shame. Our Lord remembers well his wounds by which he procured our healing. He remembers the cruel tree by which he uplifts us from hell. He remembers his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion; and he hath pity on the guilty for whom he died. Do you also remember the sufferings of your Lord, and trust him; trust him fully and alone. Look at once to him that liveth, and was dead, and is alive for evermore: by that look you will live. At this moment worship him. Bow at his feet. While yet in these seats prostrate your hearts before the Son of God, and leave yourselves with Him, that he may give you eternal salvation. As surely as the Lord liveth, if thou, poor lonely one, dost believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, thou art saved. Go in peace, and rejoice thyself for ever in the great salvation he hath given thee, and look to him yet more and more all the days of thy life. I remember that on January the eighth, many years ago, I looked to Christ, and I am praying that this seventh day of September, I who looked may be the means of leading others to look to him and live. Why not? Dear men and women out of Christ, why not look to Jesus now? My heart breaks for your immediate salvation. Spirit of the living God, draw them to Christ, and to his name be glory for ever and ever! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark i. 21—45.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—909, 509, 304.

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IMMANUEL—THE LIGHT OF LIFE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 14TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."—Isaiah ix. 1, 2.

As in this case the Revised Version is much to be preferred, we will now read it:—

"But there shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time hath he made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."—Isaiah ix. 1, 2.

When Judah was in sore distress, the sign that she should be delivered was Immanuel. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah vii. 14). When no other ray of comfort could be found, light came from the promise of the wondrous birth of him whose name is "God with us." God alone would be the deliverer of Judah when over-matched by her two enemies. God would be with them, and he gave them as a pledge a vision of that time when, in very deed, God would dwell among men, and wear their nature in the person of The Virgin-born.

It is noteworthy that the clearest promises of the Messiah have been given in the darkest hours of history. If the prophets had been silent upon the Coming One before, they always speak out in the cloudy and dark day; for well the Spirit made them know that the coming of God in human flesh is the lone star of the world's night. It was so in the beginning, when our first parents had sinned, and were doomed to quit the Paradise of delights. It was not meet that rebels should be dwellers in the garden of the Lord, they must go forth to till the ground from whence they were taken; but ere they went, there fell upon their ear the prophecy of the Deliverer who would be born: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." How bright shone that one promise amid the surrounding gloom! The earliest believers found in this hope of the coming Conqueror of the serpent a solace amid their labour and sorrow. When Israel was in

Egypt, when they were in the sorest bondage, and when many plagues had been wrought on Pharaoh, apparently without success; for he knew not the Lord, neither would he let his people go; then Israel saw the Messiah set before her as the Paschal lamb, whose blood sprinkled on the lintel and the two side posts secured the chosen from the avenger of blood. The type is marvellously clear, and the times were marvellously dark. It seemed as if the Lord would make the consolation to abound even as the tribulation abounded.

I will not multiply instances; but I will quote three cases from the prophetical books which now lie open before us. In Isaiah, turn to his twenty-eighth chapter, and the sixteenth verse, and you read that glorious prophecy: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." When was that given? It was pronounced when the foundation of society in Israel was rotten with iniquity, and when its corner stone was oppression. Read from verse fourteen: "Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." Thus, when lies and falsehoods ruled the hour, the Lord proclaims the blessed truth that the Messiah would come and would be a sure foundation for believers. Next, look into Jeremiah, and pause at the twenty-third chapter and the fifth verse: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." When was this clear testimony given? Read the former verses of the chapter, and see that the pastors were destroying and scattering the sheep of Jehovah's pasture. When the people of the Lord thus found their worst enemies where they ought to have met with friendly care, then they were promised happier days through the coming of the divine Son of David. I will only further detain you while we glance at Ezekiel xxxiv. 23, where the Lord says, "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd." When came this cheering promise concerning that great Shepherd of the sheep? It came when Israel is thus described: "And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them." Thus you see that, in each case, when things were at their worst, the Lord Jesus was the one well of consolation in a desert of sorrows.

"Midst darkest shades, if he appear,
Our dawning has begun;
He is our soul's bright morning star,
And he our rising sun."

In the worst times we are to preach Christ, and to look to Christ. In Jesus there is a remedy for the direst of diseases, and a rescue from the darkest of despairs. Ahaz, as the chapter tells us, was in great danger, for he was attacked by two kings, each one stronger than himself; but the Lord promised him deliverance, and commanded him to choose a sign either in the heights, or in the depths. This, under a hypocritical pretence, he refused to do; and therefore the Lord chose as his own token the appearance of the heavenly Deliverer, who would be God, and yet born of a woman. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." He was to eat butter and honey, like other children in that land of milk and honey, and yet he was to be the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. We see here Godhead in union with manhood. We behold Jesus man "of the substance of his mother," and yet "God over all, blessed for ever." Surely this God-appointed sign was both in the depth and in the height above: the Man of sorrows, the Son of the Highest. This vision was the light of the age of Ahaz. It is God's comfort to troubled hearts in all the ages; it is God's sign of grace to us this morning. The sure hope of sinners and the great joy of saints is the incarnate Lord, Immanuel, God with us. May he be your joy and mine even this day. He it is who is the great light of the people who dwell in the land of the shadow of death: if any among you are in that dreary land, may he be light and life to you! He alone could make the darkness of Zebulun and Naphtali to disappear in a blaze of glory: he can do the same for those who sorrow at this hour.

Now, if I may have your patient attention, I shall, as I am enabled, *illustrate this fact by the context.* Scripture best explains Scripture, as diamond cuts diamond. The Word of God carries its own keys for all its locks. It is profitable to study Scripture, not in fragments, but in connected paragraphs. It is well to see the glory of a star, but better to behold the whole constellation in which it shines. When I have dwelt upon the context, I shall, in the second place, *press home certain joyful truths connected with the subject.*

I. There is to be a light breaking in upon the sons of men who sit in darkness, and this light is to be found only in the incarnate God. Let me ILLUSTRATE THIS FACT BY THE CONTEXT.

I must carry you back to the fourteenth verse of the seventh chapter. *The sign of coming light is Jesus.* "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." In Judah's trouble, the Virgin-born was God's token that he would deliver, and that speedily; for in less time than it would take such a child to reach years of knowledge, both Judah's royal adversaries would be gone. The sign was good for Ahaz; but it is better far for us. Behold the incarnate Son of God born of Mary at Bethlehem; what can this intend for us but grace? If the Lord had meant to destroy us, he would not have assumed our nature. If he had not been moved with mighty love to a guilty race, he would never have taken upon himself their flesh and blood. It is a miracle of miracles that the Infinite should become an infant; that he who is pure spirit, and filleth all things, should be

wrapped in swaddling bands, and cradled in a manger. He took not on him the nature of angels, though that would have been a tremendous stoop from Deity, but he descended lower still; for he took on him the seed of Abraham. "He was made in all things like unto his brethren"; though "he counted it not robbery to be equal with God." It is not in the power of human lips to speak out all the comfort which this one sign contains. If any troubled soul will look believingly at God in human flesh, he must take heart of hope. If he looks believingly, his comfort will come right speedily. The birth of Jesus is the proof of the good will of God to men: I am unable to conceive of proof more sure. He would not have come here to be born among men, to live among them, suffer and to die for them, if he had been slow to pardon, or unwilling to save. O despairing soul, does not Immanuel, God with us, make it hard to doubt the mercy of the Lord?

We have comfort in the fact that our Lord was truly man. He whom we worship became one with us in nature. He was born as other children are born, save that his mother was a virgin. He was fed as other children were fed, upon curds and honey, the food of a pastoral country. He had to be developed, as to his natural powers, even as other little ones. He grew up from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood, passing through all the gradations of human weakness, even as we have done; and he was obedient to his parents, even as other children should be. He is, therefore, really and truly a man; and this fact is a bright particular star for sinners' eyes. Come to Jesus, all ye who languish under terror and dread because of the majesty of Deity; for here you see how compassionate he is, how sympathetic he can be, yea, how near of kin he has become. He is God; but he is God *with us*. He is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, a brother born for adversity; and here the most trembling may be at rest. God in our nature is a grand prophecy of salvation and bliss for us. Why has he come down to us but that we may come up to him? Why has he taken our nature in its sorrow, but that we may be made partakers of the divine nature in righteousness and holiness? He comes down, not to thrust us lower, but to lift us to heights of perfectness and glory. That Jesus is man and yet God, is full of hope and joy for us who believe in him. I do not feel as if I wanted to enlarge upon this glorious truth with words alone. Oh, that the Holy Spirit would convey to each one of my hearers the light which shines from the star of incarnation! Oh, that at this moment the people who walk in darkness may see in the incarnate God a great light, and perceive in him the prophecy and assurance of all good things! Not long shall evil oppress the believer; for in Christ Jesus God is with us; and if God be for us, who can be against us?

"O joy! there sitteth in our flesh,
Upon a throne of light,
One of a human mother born,
In perfect Godhead bright!

"For ever God, for ever man,
My Jesus shall endure;
And fix'd on him, my hope remains
Eternally secure."

Further on we see our Lord Jesus as *the hold-fast of the soul in time of darkness.* See in the eighth verse of the eighth chapter the whole country overwhelmed by the fierce armies of the Assyrians, as when a land is submerged beneath a flood. Then you read—"And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel." The one hope that remained for Judah was that her country was Immanuel's land. There would Immanuel be born, there would he labour, and there would he die. He was by eternal covenant the King of that land, and no Assyrian could keep him from his throne. Whatever the enemy might do, the land was still "thy land, O Immanuel!" If, my dear friend, you are a believer in Christ, you belong to him, and you always were his by sovereign right, even when the enemy held you in possession. The devil had set his mark upon you, so that you might be for ever his branded slave; but he had no legal right to you, for Immanuel had redeemed you, and he claimed you as his own. Had we known, we might exultingly have gloried over you, "Thy soul, O Immanuel!" The Father gave you to Jesus, and Jesus himself bought you with his blood; and, though you knew it not, he had the title-deeds of you, and would not lose his inheritance. Herein lay your hope when all other hope was gone. Herein is your hope now. If you belong to Jesus, he will have you. If he bought you with his blood, he will not shed that blood in vain. If on the cross he bore your sin, he will not suffer you to bear it, and so to make void his sacrifice. If you belong to him he will deliver you, even as David snatched the lamb of his flock from the jaw of the lion and the paw of the bear. O sinner, this is the great hope we have for you: if you were given of old to Jesus he will rescue you from the hand of the enemy. This, also, is your own hope: if you believe in Jesus you belong to Jesus; if you trust him, he has redeemed you with a price, and will also redeem you with power. If you cast your guilty soul at his dear feet, and take him to be your own Saviour, you are not your own, but bought with a price; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than one whom Jesus calls his own shall be left to perish. "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end." Immanuel, God with us, is strong to rescue his own out of the enemy's hand.

Further on in the chapter we learn that Jesus is *our star of hope as to the destruction of the enemy.* The foes of God's people shall be surely vanquished and destroyed because of Immanuel. Note well, in verses 9 and 10, how it is put twice over, like an exultant taunt: "Gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for Immanuel." Our version translates the word into "God with us," but it is "Immanuel." In him, even in our Lord Jesus Christ, dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and he has brought all that Godhead to bear upon the overthrow of the foes of his people. Let the powers of darkness consult and plot as they may, they can never destroy the Lord's redeemed. Lo! I see councils of evil spirits: they sit down in Pandemonium, and conspire to ruin a soul redeemed by

blood. They lay their heads together, they use a cunning deep as hell: they are eager to destroy the soul that rests in Jesus. In vain their devices, for the incarnate God is embodied wisdom. Now see them: they rise from the council table, they put on their harness; their arrows are dipped in malice, and their bows are strong to shoot afar. Each foul spirit takes his sword, his sharp sword, that will cut a soul to the centre, and kill it with despair; but their weapons shall all fail. If we fly to Jesus, who is God with us, no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper. His name Immanuel is the terror of the hosts of hell. God with us means confusion to our foes. As the death of death, and hell's destruction, our Immanuel cries to the legions of the pit, "Gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces"! Let us take courage and defy the legions of darkness. Let us charge them with this war-cry, "God is with us." Immanuel, who has espoused our cause, is God himself, almighty to save: the enemies of our souls shall be trodden under his feet, and he shall bruise Satan even under our feet shortly. Satan from the first hated God in our nature, for thus man was exalted beyond the angel; and this his pride could not endure. The Lord Jesus is as the star Wormwood to our spiritual adversaries, rousing their fiercest hate, and foreboding their sure overthrow.

Further on we find *the Lord Jesus as the morning light after a night of darkness.* The last verses of the eighth chapter picture a horrible state of wretchedness and despair: "And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward. And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness." But see what a change awaits them! Read the fine translation of the Revised Version: "But there shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish." What a marvellous light from the midst of a dreadful darkness! It is an astounding change, such as only God with us could work. Many of you know nothing about the miseries described in those verses; but there are some here who have traversed that terrible wilderness; and I am going to speak to them. I know where you are this morning: you are being driven as captives into the land of despair, and for the last few months you have been tramping along a painful road, "hardly bestead and hungry." You are sorely put to it, and your soul finds no food of comfort, but is ready to faint and die. You fret yourself: your heart is wearing away with care, and grief, and hopelessness. In the bitterness of your soul you are ready to curse the day of your birth. The captive Israelites cursed their king who had led them into their defeat and bondage; in the fury of their agony, they even cursed God and longed to die. It may be that your heart is in such a ferment of grief that you know not what you think, but are like a man at his wits' end. Those who led you into sin are bitterly remembered; and as you think upon God you are troubled. This is a dreadful case for a soul to be in, and it involves a world of sin and misery. You look up, but the heavens are as brass above your head;

your prayers appear to be shut out from God's ear; you look around you upon the earth, and behold "trouble and darkness, and dimness of anguish"; your every hope is slain, and your heart is torn asunder with remorse and dread. Every hour you seem to be hurried by an irresistible power into greater darkness, yea, even into the eternal midnight. In such a case none can give you comfort save Immanuel, God with us. Only God, espousing your cause, and bearing your sin, can possibly save you. See, he comes for your salvation! Behold, he has come to seek and to save that which was lost. God has come down from heaven, and veiled himself in our flesh, that he might be able to save to the uttermost. He can save the chief of sinners: he can save *you*. Come to Jesus, you that have gone furthest into transgression, you that sit down in despondency, you that shut yourselves up in the iron cage of despair. For such as you there shines this star of the first magnitude. Jesus has appeared to save, and he is God and man in one person: man that he may feel our woes, God that he may help us out of them. No minister can save you, no priest can save you—you know this right well; but here is one who is able to save to the uttermost, for he is God as well as man. The great God is good at a dead lift; when everything else has failed, the lever of omnipotence can lift a world of sin. Jesus is almighty to save! That which in itself is impossibility is possible with God. Sin which nothing else can remove is blotted out by the blood of Immanuel. Immanuel, our Saviour, is God with us; and God with us means difficulty removed, and a perfect work accomplished. But I fail to tell you in words. Oh, that the light itself would shine into your souls, that those of you who have as yet no hope may see a great light, and may from henceforth be of good courage!

Once more, dear friends, we learn from that which follows our text, that *the reign of Jesus is the star of the golden future*. He came to Galilee of the Gentiles, and made that country glorious, which had been brought into contempt. That corner of Palestine had very often borne the brunt of invasion, and had felt more than any other region the edge of the keen Assyrian sword. They were at first troubled when the Assyrian was bought off with a thousand talents of silver; but they were more heavily afflicted when Tiglath-pileser carried them all away to Assyria, for which see the fifteenth chapter of the second book of the Kings. It was a wretched land, with a mixed population, despised by the purer race of Jews; but that very country became glorious with the presence of the incarnate God. It was there that all manner of diseases were healed; there the seas were stilled, and the multitudes were fed; it was there that the Lord Jesus found his apostles, and there he met the whole company of his followers when he had risen from the dead. That first land to be invaded by the enemy was made the head-quarters of the army of salvation: this very Zebulun and Naphtali, which had been so downtrodden and despised, was made the scene of the mighty works of the Son of God. Even so, at this day his gracious presence is the day-dawn of our joy.

If Christ comes to you, my dear hearer, as God with us, then shall your joy be great; for you shall joy as with the joy of harvest, and as those rejoice that divide the spoil. Is it not so? Many of us can

bear our witness that there is no joy like that which Jesus brings. Here read and interpret the third verse of the ninth chapter.

Then shall your enemy be defeated, as in the day of Midian. Gideon was, in his dream, likened to a barley-cake, which struck the tent of Midian, so that it lay along. He and his few heroes, with their pitchers and their trumpets, stood and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" and Midian melted away before them. So shall it be with our sins, and doubts, and fears, if we believe in Jesus, the incarnate God; they shall vanish like the mists of the morning. The Lord Jesus will break the yoke of our burden, and the rod of our oppressor, as in the day of Midian. Be of good courage, ye that are in bondage to fierce and cruel adversaries; for in the name of Jesus, who is God with us, you shall destroy them. This you see in the fourth verse. Please follow me as I dwell on each verse.

When Jesus comes, you shall have eternal peace; for his battle is the end of battles. "All the armour of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire." This is the rendering of the Revision; and it is good. The Prince of peace wars against war, and destroys it. What a glorious day is that in which the Lord breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariot in the fire! I think I see it now. My sins, which were the weapons of my foes, the Lord piles in heaps. What mountains of prey! But see! he brings the fire-brand of his love from the altar of his sacrifice, and he sets fire to the gigantic pile. See how they blaze! They are utterly consumed for ever. The enemy has now no weapon that he can use against my soul. The incarnate God has broken the power of the adversary, for the sting of death is sin, and that he has made an end of. He has thus destroyed the war which raged in our souls, and now he reigns as Prince of peace, and we have peace in him.

Now is it that the Lord Jesus becomes glorious in our eyes; and he whose name is Immanuel is now crowned in our heart with many crowns, and honoured with many titles. What a list of glories we have here! What a burst of song it makes when we sing of the Messiah: "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"! Each word sounds like a salvo of artillery. It is all very well to hear players on instruments and sweet singers rehearse these words; but to believe them, and realize them in your own soul, is better far. When every fear and every hope, and every power and every passion of our nature fill the orchestra of our heart, and all unite in one inward song unto the glorious Immanuel, what music it is! He is to us the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, and much more than words can tell. Do but get Christ Jesus in your soul, as the incarnate God, and he will set up a government within your nature which shall bring you peace, and righteousness, and joy, and eternal glory. He will so reign over you that your happiness shall know no bound; but you shall climb from grace to grace, from joy to joy, from peace to peace, yea, from heaven to the highest heaven. This all along shall be your divinest comfort, that Jesus is both God and man, even God with us.

Thus have I very briefly skimmed over the connection. Had we time and grace, what a wealth of thought might be drawn from these inexhaustible mines!

II. But now, secondly, I want to PRESS HOME CERTAIN TRUTHS CONNECTED WITH MY THEME. Come, Holy Spirit, to help the preacher! Come, divine Comforter, to troubled hearts, and give them rest in Immanuel!

Immanuel is a grand word. "God with us" means more than tongue can tell. It means enmity removed on our part, and justice vindicated on God's part. It means the whole Godhead engaged on our side, resolved to bless us.

But you say to me, "Who is this? Are you sure that Immanuel is Jesus of Nazareth?" Yes, *Jesus is Immanuel.* Will you turn to Matthew i. 21, and read onward, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying: Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Do you see this? They call his name Jesus to fulfil the prophecy that they should call his name Immanuel! It is a singular fulfilment surely. It can only be accounted for by the fact that the Holy Spirit regards the name "Jesus" as being tantamount to the name "Immanuel." The Saviour is God with us. Jesus, a Saviour, is, in the Hebrew, Joshua, or Jehoshua, that is, Jehovah saving. The sense is the same as that of Immanuel, or "God with us," or for us; since God for us is sure to save us. The two names are the same in essential meaning. If God has come to save, then God is with us; if God himself is our salvation, then God is on our side; and if the child born of the virgin be indeed the Lord of glory, then is God our friend. Strong Son of God! Immortal Love! We have not seen thy face; but we can trust thy power, and rest upon thy love. Thy very birth brings hope; but as for thy death, when thou didst bear our sins in thine own body on the tree, this is the fulfilment of all our desires, in the cancelling of sin, the removal of wrath, and the securing of eternal life. Yes, Jesus is God with us.

Perhaps you wish to know a little more of the incident in the text which exhibits *Jesus as the great light.* We have spoken of Zebulun and Naphtali: were those regions really benefited by the coming of the Lord Jesus? Just look a little further on, to Matthew iv. 12: "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Yes, beloved, our Lord made his home in the darkest parts. He looked about and saw no country so

ignorant, no country so sorrowful, as Galilee of the Gentiles, and therefore he went there, and lifted it up to heaven by priceless privileges! His ministry of repentance and faith was in itself a glorious light; but he did many mighty works to confirm it. Why, the whole country round was full of sick folk whom he had restored. You could not go half a mile but what you met a blind man who told of how Jesus had restored his sight, or a sick woman who had been raised up from the fever, or some paralytic who had been made whole. That country must have been glad indeed. Multitudes would never forget how they heard him by the sea. They said, "What sermons he preached! He made our hearts dance for joy; and then he fed us, and we ate of barley loaves and little fish till we were filled. He is a wonderful prophet, and this is a wonderful country; once dark enough, but now enlightened by his presence." Beloved, I pray that Jesus may come to you if you are in the dark to-day, and work miracles for you, feed you, and teach you, and make you glad, so that, though you were the most unhappy of beings, you may become the happiest of mortal men. Galilee, plundered, despoiled, despised, became, by-and-by, glorious, because of him who is Immanuel. This is a happy omen for you, dear friends: if you have been the most sorrowful of beings, the Lord Jesus may come at once to you and make you rejoice with great joy. Jesus rescues from contempt, from ignorance, from misery, from despair, and therein reveals himself as "God with us."

We will turn back to where we opened our Bibles at the first, and there we learn that, to be God with us, *Jesus must be accepted by us*. He cannot be with us if we will not have him. Hear how the prophet words it: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." As a child he was born, as a son he was given. He comes to us in two ways—in his human nature, born; in his divine nature, given. But I want you to see that all the sweetness and light that can come to you through him, must come by your putting both your hands upon him, and taking him to be your own. Here is one hand, "*Unto us* a child is born"; here is the other, "*Unto us* a son is given." Do you ask, "What are these two hands?" I received a note from one of my hearers, who pleads, "Tell me, sir, what faith is; tell me what you mean by believing and trusting." My dear friend, I am always telling you *that*, and I mean to keep on always telling you it so long as I have a tongue to move. By a daring act of appropriation take Jesus to be yours, and say with me—oh, that we could all say it in one great shout!—"UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN, UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN." God gives him, we take him. He is born, we take him up in our arms, and feel ready to cry, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He is a Son given. Shall we not accept this gift of gifts, and love him because he has first loved us? To believe is to take freely what God gives freely. It is the simplest thing that can be. I could not explain to you what to drink is; but I will put this glass to my lips, and actually perform the action. Now you see what it is. The water is put to the lip, it is allowed to flow into the mouth and down the throat, and so it is drunk. Take Christ just so. Up

to the very lip of your reception he flows; open the mouth of your soul, and take him into yourself. "May I?" say you. May you? You are threatened with damnation if you do not; for this is one side of the gospel message, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." A man may certainly do that which involves him in condemnation if he does not do it. That awful threatening is one of the most powerful bits of gospel that I know of: it drives while the promise draws. If you want Christ, you may have him. If you desire to have God with you, he waits to be gracious unto you. If you wish for Immanuel, behold him in Jesus, your Lord.

"Oh, but I wish I had some sign that I might be sure!" What sign do you want beyond the gift of God, the birth of Jesus? Away with demands which are wild and ungenerous. The Word of God bids you believe and live. The moment you believe in Jesus he is yours. Say, then, this morning, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," and say it with fulness of delight.

Be sure that you go on with the verse to the end—"and the government shall be upon his shoulder." If Christ is your Saviour he must be your King.

> "But know, nor of the terms complain,
> Where Jesus comes he comes to reign:
> To reign, and with no partial sway;
> Lusts must be slain that disobey."

The moment we really believe in Jesus as our salvation we fall before him, and call him Master and Lord. We serve when he saves. He has redeemed us unto himself, and we own that we are his. A generous man once bought a slave-girl. She was put upon the block for auction, and he pitied her and purchased her; but when he had bought her he said to her, "I have bought you to set you free. There are your papers, you are a free woman." The grateful creature fell at his feet and cried, "I will never leave you; if you have made me free I will be your servant as long as you live, and serve you better than any slave could do." This is how we feel towards Jesus. He sets us free from the dominion of Satan, and then, as we need a ruler, we say, "And the government shall be upon his shoulder." We are glad to be ruled by "Immanuel, God with us." This also is a door of hope to us. That Jesus shall be the monarch of our hearts is our exceeding joy. To us he shall be always "Wonderful." When we think of him, or speak about him, it shall be with reverent awe. When we need advice and comfort, we will fly to him, for he shall be our Counsellor. When we need strength, we will look to him as our Mighty God. Born again by his Spirit, we will be his children, and he shall be the Everlasting Father. Full of joy and rest, we will call him Prince of Peace.

Are you willing to have Christ to govern you? Will you spend your lives in praising him? You are willing to have Christ to pardon you, but we cannot divide him, and therefore you must also have him to sanctify you. You must not take the crown from his head; but accept him as the monarch of your soul. If you would have his hand

to help you, you must obey the sceptre which it grasps. Blessed Immanuel, we are right glad to obey thee! In thee our darkness ends, and from the shadow of death we rise to the light of life. It is salvation to be obedient to thee. It is the end of gloom to her that was in anguish to bow herself before thee. May God the Holy Spirit take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, and then we shall all cry—

"Go worship at Immanuel's feet!
See in his face what wonders meet!
Earth is too narrow to express
His worth, his grace, his righteousness."

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah vii. 10—16; viii. 5—8, 19—22; ix. 1—7.

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"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 18TH, 1889, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only."—Psalm lxxi. 16.

THIS is a psalm of David's old age, and we will carefully notice the characteristic feature of it. It is not addressed to men concerning God, but it is addressed to God himself, for he was David's dearest friend. Our psalms and hymns are not for man's criticism, but for the Lord's acceptance.

This is the tenor of the psalm: he has been with his God, and he is now ready for anything. This grand old man, in his later days, is exposed to enemies quite as fierce as those which he had to encounter in his earlier times; but instead of gathering his friends together, and conversing with them, and seeking their counsel, he gets quite alone, and begins to cry, "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion." Trusting alone in God makes us grandly independent towards men. The man of God shuts to the door: he realizes that the Lord is in the chamber with him, and he speaks to him, saying, "Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress." He pours out his heart before God, and pleads with him, "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help." It is a delightful sight: there are two in the room, though you can only see one with the natural eye. The man whom you can see, discerns another, a great and glorious One, and he talks with him "as a man talketh with his friend."

Is this a fancy picture to you, my brother, my sister? Is this merely a sketch of something which happened ages ago? Have *you* not often been one in that scene? I know that I have been there, and I trust that it has been so with you. These are the choicest joys we know—these lone communings with Jehovah, our God. That room where we are alone with God is the nearest to heaven of any place between here and Paradise. I wish that we oftener enjoyed communion with closed doors. We might. Why do we not? Whatever we gain by occupying our time otherwise, can, at the best, be only

compared to silver; but this is the golden way of spending hours. When we are with God, we have the All-in-all for company, and he fills our minds better than a thousand finite beings could do. The Lord our God has filled our heart, and filled our room, and filled the universe for us, and we are overflowing with blessedness.

It is good to come here and mingle with God's people in public worship. As my well-beloved brother, Mr. Williams, said in prayer just now: many a Thursday night have the saints of God come in here burdened, and they have gone away lightened, for God has met with them. Our Thursday nights are little Sabbaths in the middle of the week; halting places between the Sundays; oases in the desert of our toil. But there is something closer, and less likely to be a mere form, in our private meetings with God. I pray you, make many secret appointments with your Lord; and keep them. Have many trysting places, where you and your Well-Beloved meet. Certain I am that it will be imperative upon you to meet him, whenever you are in sore trouble: your sense of need will drive you to it. I do not know that Jacob ever spent a whole night with God, till he was about to meet his brother Esau, and was in great fear that he would smite the mother with the children. Then it was that he said—

> "With thee all night I mean to stay,
> And wrestle till the break of day."

I warrant you, Jacob was a greater gainer by that fright than if he had never heard a whisper of opposition. It was well for him that he had an Esau, with armed men, to drive him to his God. He could say afterwards, "It was good for me to have been afflicted." Anything that brings us into close fellowship with God, however evil in itself, works for us the grandest form of good. Now, if there are any here very much like David; if they are growing aged; and if, being aged, they are also surrounded by slander, persecution, and reproach, let them see what David did. If they are met by great difficulties, and even by malicious adversaries, let them go where David went. Go and sit before the Lord, and pour out your heart before him. I think I see David sitting there, naturally full of sorrow; an old man, compassed with infirmities, and, at the same time, bowed down with troubles; and there he is rejoicing in the faithful God, of whom he says, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come." He has realized the presence of his God in secret, and his troubles are laid before God in prayer. Gradually they subside. He began to speak very hopefully; now he rises from hope to a joyful confidence. The old man goes on talking there, as some would say, "to himself"; but we know better: he was conversing with his God; and before that hallowed interview is over, he has reached such a happy state of mind, that he says, "My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee." His fingers long to join his lips, and he is looking out for his psaltery and his harp, that instrumental music may aid his tongue, and that so he may praise God with all his might. Communion with

God is a great maker of music; so that he who went into the chamber halting, comes out leaping. He that meets God with tears in his eyes, comes forth from holy solitude with songs in his mouth. May it be so with you! When you are far away from any house of prayer where you are likely to hear what will comfort and bless you, go to God straightway and tell him all that is in your heart. Forget minister and congregation, and go straight to him who is far greater than churches and pastors. Pour out your plaint where it will meet with divine sympathy. Confess your trust into his ear, who is never weary of his people's voice; and you shall have found the greatest strength that is to be found this side heaven, and you shall sing, "Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side."

Taking as my text this particular verse in David's talk with God, I want you to notice, first of all, *his resolve:* "I will go." Secondly, *his reliance:* "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." And thirdly, *his message*, which he intends always to deliver: "I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only."

I. Now, here is, first, HIS RESOLVE. "*I will go*," saith he.

From this it is clear that *he will not sit still.* See! he has come a long way already, and he is getting weary and faint, and the flesh suggests to him that he has had enough of it; while the devil hints to him that he has done too much already, and that the best thing he can do now, is to give up struggling, battling, warring, and contending, and just sit down, and let things go as they like. Do you not hear the advice of unbelief, "Let affairs drift. You cannot help yourself, old man. You have got into a very sad condition. Give up your confidence in heaven. Perhaps you have been under a delusion all these years, and trust in this God of yours is sheer fanaticism. Do not go on with it. Be reasonable, like the many that are round about you who are criticizing, and amusing themselves, and while professing everything, are believing nothing. Give up the contest, and drop the sword with which you contended for your Master, and let things go as they may." So whispers Satan. So murmurs the flesh. So advises the worldly friend. The brave old man gets up, and cries, "No, *I will go.* I will not sit still. I will not give it up. I have not finished my life-work. I have more to do. I have further testimony to bear for my Master. I shall not idly quit the field, but still bear the battle's brunt. I shall not quit the pilgrimage: I will go, even now, though it be with tottering footsteps. Bring me my staff. I will go with the rest of the chosen company. I have not been behindhand in the marches of the past, for I have led the way as a leader of God's people, and I have sung unto his name, and taught the host to sing that his mercy endureth for ever. Shall I now turn tail? Shall I now linger in the rear? No," saith he, "I will go." See! he girds himself once again to follow the Lord, and he goes forward as bravely as when he first started on his pilgrim way.

That picture is no imaginary sketch. It has occurred to ourselves. It is a likeness taken but a few days ago. Dear friend, it may be a photograph of you. Some of you of very cheerful spirit, always bright and jubilant, do not know what it is to get discouraged. But there are others of another temperament, who, at times, are sorely put to it, and they

are tempted to abstain from the Lord's service. Prudence makes the man say, "Really, I have undertaken more than I can accomplish." As our dear friend said in prayer, there are many of the Lord's servants who have work to do for which they feel quite unfit; and, while they are under such a feeling, the hint comes to them, "Get out of it, or you will come down with a run. You are like a man walking on a tight-rope: if you once get to the other end alive, never try it again, or you will rue it. That simple reliance on God—why, it is like standing on the top of a church spire; it needs a very cool head, and a miraculous nerve. You will make a slip one of these days, and then religion will be laughed at through you." So says unbelief; but it is a grand thing if, in the moment of discouragement, the child of God can gather himself up again, gird up the loins of his mind, and, in holy sobriety, hope to the end, and say, in the language of the text, "'I will go in the strength of the Lord God'; I will not be kept back by the world, the flesh, or the devil."

It is my impression that David meant, "*I will go to warfare.*" He was a man of war from his youth up; and, of course, after many years of fighting, which is by no means pleasant work, and after many serious risks, it might naturally suggest itself to the aged man that he had better quit the tented field. Yet the old man would go. In fact, he went to battle so long that, one day, in the midst of the fight, he fainted, and then his people insisted upon it that he should not go any more; for they saw that it would be out of all character to let the old man expose himself to certain death. Did they not say to him, "Thou art worth ten thousand of us"? If he were to fall, the very light of Israel would be quenched. But there was "fight" in the old lion till the very last. The same spirit that made him go as a boy to fight with Goliath still burned in him when he became an old man, and he still said, "I will go." When he could not literally go to any physical conflict, you can see that, to the end, he fought for God and for truth, by his laws, his government, his influence, and his prayers. When he could not do one thing he did another. His enemies that gathered about him to destroy him, found that they had a very difficult task before them; for it was not true, though they said it, that the Lord was no longer on his side. They told a lie when they uttered that cruel taunt, "God has forsaken him." And they proposed more than they could carry out when they said, "Persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him." David turned a bold front towards them to the very last, setting his face like a flint, resolving that he would administer justice and maintain the cause of God in Israel, as long as he lived.

Well, dear friends, you are not called to be soldiers in the literal sense—the most of you, at any rate—but you are called to be soldiers of the cross. These are fighting times, and no one must back out of the conflict. Be not cowards; be not neutrals. Show your colours, and fear no opposition. Every day wear the red cross on your arm, by avowing your faith in the atoning blood. Still have a good word for Christ, and the old, old gospel. Be not ashamed of the doctrines of grace, nor of those who make a stand for them. Still "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints," and still

say—I will go in the strength of the Lord God, to make mention of his righteousness, and of it only.

The text may be used in many senses. "I will go in the strength of the Lord," may mean that *he will go forward and make progress in divine things*. I will go on studying the Word of God, to get a clearer apprehension of its meaning. I will go forward pleading with the Lord, to prove more effectually the power of prayer. I will go on subduing evil habits; I will put down, by God's strength, this sin, and that. I will go forth, conquering and to conquer, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, wherewith I am called to encounter. I will not be content with present attainments. I will not rest in any joy that I have yet known, nor be content with any measure of holiness which God has granted me. As the eagle cries, "Superior," and spreads its wings to meet the sun, so will I rise higher and higher, singing—

"Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee."

I know that some think it perilous work to climb into the higher form of spiritual life, and to aim even at perfection; but I will not flinch from it. If I do not reach it, yet will I aspire to it. I will go. "I will go in the strength of the Lord." Do you not think that large numbers of God's people are contented with a very poor form of spiritual life, because they do not think it possible to advance further? They have little joy, and little strength, because they are content with the joy and strength they have, and do not aspire to more. We make a great mistake, dear friends, some of us, as to the whole style of our life. I met with a story, which seemed to me a rather pretty one. There was a young woman, fair to look upon, who was seen by a very wealthy man, who determined to make her his wife. She had been brought up to habits of rigid economy, for the family was straitened in circumstances. Her father was not of the very poorest, certainly, but still poor enough; and on her marriage-day he gave her all that he could afford, namely, five pounds, and that was put into the bank. Her husband, on that day, told her that he had placed money in the bank in her name, and he handed her a cheque-book, that she might draw out whatever money she desired. Well, having been properly brought up, she spent her money very, very carefully. Five pounds was an enormous sum to her, and she felt frightened at running through so vast a sum. She found, however, that in the circle in which she was called to move, her five pounds was at last gone; and so she even ventured to draw a cheque for ten pounds. In considerable fear she went down in the carriage to the bank, to see whether they really would give her ten pounds all at a time. And when she got it she was surprised and overjoyed. She drew again, until at last she had actually spent fifty pounds! One day her husband said to her, "Don't you know how to manage a cheque-book, my dear? I scarcely understand your account at the bank." She modestly replied, "I hope I have not been extravagant." "You little goose," he said, "I put a thousand pounds in the bank for you, and I thought that you would soon expend it. Most women would. But instead of that, you have only spent fifty pounds, and you cannot behave yourself as my wife

on such a pittance. Remember, you may be a poor man's daughter, but you are a rich man's wife; so just begin to spend according to my riches, and not according to your father's economy." This is our case in reference to our Lord Jesus. We know we are a poor man's children. My original father "broke" long ago. There was nothing left of all the family estate. When father Adam was in business, he became a bankrupt, and he left us nothing but a sea of debt. But then we are married to King Jesus, who is heir of all things, and he puts the cheque-book of the promises into our hands, that we may draw from the riches of divine grace. Do not let us live according to our natural quality, but let us live according to our supernatural elevation, and begin to spend according to the wealth of our Husband. Very few women need encouragement to spend money; but very many Christian women and Christian men need very great encouragement to draw upon the goodness of God, and to live at that high and noble rate of grace to which they are entitled by the election of God, by the call of the Holy Spirit, and by their heavenly union with the Lord Jesus Christ. I wish that we could pluck up courage, and say, "I will go in for great grace, and eminent holiness, and close conformity to Christ. I will draw upon his riches in glory, and spend at a royal rate. Why should I not show forth all that grace can do? Is there any reason why I should be weak and wavering? I would be as David, yea, as my Lord. Yes, I will rouse myself, the Holy Spirit helping me, and I will seek the highest and best things that a Christian man can know. I will go."

Let us cheerfully use this text *whenever any service is proposed to us.* A young man has been asked to preach at a small cottage meeting. He has been hesitating during the last two or three days whether he shall go or not. I want him to feel that, if this is a work in which he can glorify God, he should say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." There is a sister here who has been invited to take a class of young women. She thinks that she is hardly fitted for the Bible-class proposed to her; and yet she is the only person available, and evidently the finger of God points to her. I want her to say, with David, "I will go in the strength of the Lord." Have you rendered no service to your Saviour? Have I the unhappiness to be addressing some member of a church who has really done nothing for the Redeemer? Do you understand what the gospel is? Do you know what its effect upon the heart is? If so, how can you remain idle? I do not understand you, or your religion. A man who is saved—who *is* saved—who has no longer to live with a view to his own salvation, but *is* saved—what can he do but feel, "Bought with thy blood, my gracious Lord, I belong to thee, and now I must spend all my days in serving thee"? It is an instinct of the Christian life to wish to be doing something to glorify God and to save the souls of others. If you have not that instinct, I should question whether you are really born of God at all. Can hard hearts have been renewed? Will the Lord own sluggards as his children? Did the heavenly Husbandman really plant an utterly barren tree? Be it so, that, hitherto, you have done nothing. May the Holy Spirit at once awaken you, and may you say, before you leave this Tabernacle:

"I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness"!

We have also before us *a man who will go to suffering with holy resignation.* A sister, just now, sent a letter asking us to pray for her while she undergoes an operation. May the Lord sustain her! It is a prayer we often have to put up, in this large congregation, for some of the very dearest and best amongst us. Dear friends, the text is for you with regard to the suffering you have to encounter: may you go forward to it without fear! Some of us have to take turns at the two forms of appointed exercise: we are sometimes serving, sometimes suffering; and occasionally we carry a pair of panniers, and both work and suffer. The Lord will be with us under every form of trial: he will sustain us under personal pain, or bereavement, or business care, or cruel persecution. Therefore, believer, do not linger, but say, "I will go, I will go."

> "If but my fainting heart be blest
> With thy sweet Spirit for its guest,
> My God, to thee I leave the rest;
> 'Thy will be done!'"

Grand words were those of our Lord when, the supper being ended, and the next thing was the bloody sweat, he said, "Arise, let us go hence"! He does not merely wait for the trial to come, but he advances to take up his cross, and to bear the grief which was laid upon him by his Father. So let us say to-night, "I do not know how dark the rest of my way may be. I see that it is strewn with thorns and briars; but in the Lord's name, solemnly, in syllables spoken each one of them in deep determination, I declare that I will go in the strength of the Lord."

Beloved, may it be so *when we come to die!* In a short time, unless the Lord shall come, you and I will have to go upstairs and gather up our feet in the bed, and die our fathers' God to meet. Well, if it should happen to be some disease which gives us warning and opportunity to think beforehand, we will go onward, with death in full view, without any trepidation, in the strength of the Lord. Some of us know what it is to lie for days and weeks, looking into eternity, till our eyes have been able to gaze steadily on death and all the future, and we have grown so used to the prospect, and so peaceful in reference to it, that we have almost been sorry to come back again to life and its trials and sins. When we were so prepared, and even so jubilant in the prospect of passing into the world of spirits, we almost reluctantly turned our face earthward again. When the time does actually arrive, our God will give us grace to say, "I will go: I will go. My Lord has called me over the river, and I will go. I hear his sweet and mighty voice saying, 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away'! I answer to it gladly, My Master, I will come." I will go in the strength of the Lord God. Perhaps I have said enough upon this point. May we be ready to march when the trumpet sounds. Without fear or question may we say at once, "Where he leads me I will follow."

II. Now, secondly, notice HIS RELIANCE. He is ready to go, but he tells us how—"*I will go in the strength of the Lord God.*"

He would go glorying in strength already received. Deep down in the middle of the words (I cannot give you the critical way in which we come at it, but it is so), David means that while others put on their garments, and array themselves in beauty, he will put on the strengths of Jehovah (it is in the plural), and they shall make garments for him. It is a wonderful picture to me. While others glory in another strength, he takes God's might as it has been displayed in his past career, and he puts it on as his armour. He would not wear Saul's armour, nor any fabric of carnal wisdom, neither now nor when he went against Goliath. He said to the giant, "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts": he put on as a coat of mail the secret strength of God which he had verified and demonstrated in his own past career, when he slew the lion and the bear. What a wonderful thing it is for a child of God to stand clothed with those garments of glory and beauty which are made up of what God has wrought in him and wrought for him! How happy is he to be renewed in might by remembering the strength of God which he has hitherto experienced! These are a fit marching dress for his soul to wear. He may go forward to his future without fearing, who has such a past to reflect upon.

David means that *he would go relying upon a strength which did not alter.* The source from which we draw our strength, dear friends, is as full of omnipotence as when David drew from it—certainly as full as when we went to it in our younger days. Our own strength is much less as our years increase; but it is not so with the Lord strong and mighty. Where we could have traversed a county, we now weary with a mile. Old men find that they cannot do what they once did; but God can do all things evermore. Our own strength is a cistern soon drained dry; but we need not thirst, for we can tap the great "deep that lieth under." Our faith knows how to bore an Artesian well, when surface water fails. Let us bore deep, and then the stream will flow in summer and in winter, never frozen, never parched; and we may be always "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." So, David means that he would go in the all-sufficiency and the immutable power of the Most High.

He felt that *he would go, also, in a power which sanctified his going.* "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." Where will a man go in that strength? To the theatre? Verily, it is a sort of constructive blasphemy to imagine a Christian's going there in the strength of the Lord. Will he enter upon a speculation in which he will, in all probability, rob other people if he succeeds, and injure others if he is disappointed? No, not in the strength of the Lord God. There are a thousand things that a man could not think of doing in the strength of the Lord God; and yet professing men venture upon them, to their sin and shame. In the strength of the devil a man might attempt many of the doubtful enterprises and amusements of modern professors; but in the strength of the Lord God—no. It were profanity to talk of it. Do you see what a limit this puts upon a Christian's action? And yet it is no limit which in the least restricts his gracious liberty. It is such a boundary as he himself would set up. You are strong to do what you ought to do; and it is only what you ought

to do that you would wish to attempt in the strength of the Lord God. You are weak if you transgress; for the strength is gone from you when you attempt to do what would dishonour God. And is not this as it should be? Is it not just as you wish it to be? Come, beloved, you see that not only did David get strength, but he obtained holiness also from the Lord his God; for, if he would go in the holy strength of the most holy God, he could not go amiss.

Again, in this text I notice that *he is confident as to the sufficiency and adaptation of God's strength to every trial or work to which he might be called;* for the Hebrew, being plural, hints at this. "I will go in *the strengths* of the Lord God." If I shall require mental vigour, God can give it me. If I shall want physical strength, he can give it me. If I shall need spiritual power, he can give it me. If the particular demand is a clear sight, that I may detect and baffle the cunning of the enemy, he can give it me. If I require courage and quick resolve, he can give them me. If my special need be firmness of mind in the day of temptation, he can give it me. If it be a patient temper, he can give it me. Nothing is wanted by a believer, but that which the strength of God supplies when it is needed. As our days our strength shall be. We shall find the supply always equal to the demand.

"Oh," says one, "my way is very strange. I could not tell you the singular difficulty of my case." Dear friend, I do not wish to know the particulars; but I am sure that, however strange the case is to me and to you, it is not new to God; and if you go in the strength of the Lord God, you have exactly that which is suited for your perplexing path of pilgrimage. It is one of the miracles of God, that to each man he is just such a God as he needs. It is like the Welshwoman that I spoke to you about on Monday night. She would have it that Jesus Christ was not a Jew: she was certain that he was a Welshman. But how was that? How could the Lord Jesus Christ be a Welshman? She answered, "He always speaks to my heart in Welsh." Truly, good woman, he always speaks to *my* heart in English, and he speaks to the heart of each man in his own mother tongue, so that the miracle of Pentecost is repeated in our fellowship with Jesus, and every man hears in his own language the wonderful grace of God. Jesus knows how to adapt his truth, not only to each nationality, but to each personality, and to each peculiarity of that personality. Jehovah is the special God and the special strength of each individual Christian. He is my God, and my father's God, as well as your God; and no other could be so expressly suitable to me as I find the Lord my God to be. It is a wonderful thing, and we ought to render for it personal thanksgiving.

Now I will dwell for just a minute practically upon this. This text, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God," should rise to the lip of everybody here who is *engaging in new service.* You are attempting what you have never tried before. Come, now, see to every buckle of your harness, and every portion of your armour. You can see to it all at once by saying, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." Possibly you are in great weariness to-night. "I cannot do any more," say you. "The fact is, I am beginning to feel that I am an

old man." Yes, but perhaps you are feeling this in two ways: there is another old man besides old age; and when you begin to feel weary in well doing, may not the old nature have a finger in it as well as the old body? Now is the time to rouse yourself out of lethargy, shake off sinful sloth, and declare with determination, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God."

Or, possibly, *you have come to a fresh peril.* You have reached a very hard bit of the road where real danger lurks. I remember that, in going over the Grimsel, we came to a place which was called "Hell Place." It was a narrow road by the side of a precipitous gorge. The way was very slippery, and the horses began to slip about. We soon dismounted, and then we had to walk over a bit of rock, which was as smooth as ice. You do come to such a place now and then in the road of life, and you feel more than half inclined to go back; but you must not go back. Believers may not go back. It is written, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." You must to-night put down your foot, and resolve that you will never turn to the right hand nor to the left, but keep your face for ever Zion-ward. Say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God."

Or, perhaps, *you are going away from us altogether*, dear friend. You have come in here for the last time to-night, for you are going to live far away in the country. Or you have already taken your passage to New Zealand, or Australia, or Canada. Very well, go in the strength of the Lord God. That is the way to go to unknown lands. I do not think that a Christian man ought to go downstairs in his own house in any other strength; and, certainly, he should not take a journey on which the rest of his life may depend, without having sought guidance, or without fixing his reliance upon God.

"But," says one, "there is no journey for me. I fear that I am going to suffer a long illness. *I feel that great afflictions are coming upon me.*" Very well, go in the strength of the Lord God. When my deacon behind me here, whom you all know and love so well—my dear brother Mr. William Olney—had to undergo operation after operation, we prayed for him; and it is wonderful how the Lord sustained him by giving him calm faith. He was not half so troubled about himself as we were. I know that he said in his heart, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God"; and he was enabled to go on from one operation to another without fear. And here he is among us still, to serve his Lord and Master. Be you also calm, dear brothers and sisters, when your trial hour comes.

"Oh, it is not that!" says one, "but mine is a miserable family trouble. There is a lot in it that is wrong—mischief I cannot tell to anybody. I seem to get no help." Well, go in the strength of the Lord God. That is the right way to go. If you have nobody else to help you, go in his strength. I told you of a good woman who was speaking about Mr. Hudson Taylor years ago. She said, "Poor Mr. Hudson Taylor! I do not think that he can depend upon any of the missionary societies to help him. He has nobody to trust to but God." She said it in that kind of style too—"nobody to trust to *but God*." And whom do you want to trust to but God? It is a

glorious thing to get all the dog-shores knocked away, that the ship may be launched from the stocks, and may float upon the great ocean. We are apt to be hampered by friends. They stand between us and the Lord. I know I have been so hampered; but I am finding deliverance from these poor creature confidences in a very painful but effective manner. I have lost a great many on whose fidelity I thought I could depend; but since I depend on the Lord all the more, I am a gainer by ungrateful desertions. "Oh!" say you, "do not talk like that." I speak the words of soberness. It is a merey to be saved from our friends. I believe that oftentimes our trust in friends makes us live like frequenters of lodging-houses, who herd together in a miserable old shanty. When our friends are gone, and thus the old shanty comes down, what then? Why, we go off to a palace. We live at once in the palace of assurance, with God, resting in him alone. Oh, it is a poor life—the life that depends upon things seen! It is a poor life that is buttressed and shored up by this and that; but that is the best life which dwells under God's unpillared sky, and has no fear that the cerulean arch will fall. As the heavens stand unshored and unsupported, save by the word of God, so stands the man of God. Remember how Luther realized this; and when they said that Duke George would oppose him, he said, "If it rained Duke Georges, I would not care, so long as God is with me!"

> "Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
> Have nothing else to fear;
> Make you his service your delight,
> He'll make your wants his care."

"I will go in the strength of the Lord God."

III. Now, I have only a minute to speak upon the last point. I will save that for another time, I think. David informs us as to HIS MESSAGE: "*I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.*" The only testimony that he was going to bear for the rest of his life would be a testimony to the righteousness of the Lord God. Here was enough work for a lifetime, and here was the man who was at home in the work.

I cannot go into it. Therefore I say this: Bear your testimony to the righteousness of God *in providence.* Stand to it that the Lord never does wrong. He is never mistaken; but whatever he ordains is, and must be, unquestionably right. Bear witness, next, to his righteousness *in salvation;* that he does not save without an atonement; that he does not put away sin without being strictly just; that he does by no means spare the guilty, but has laid on Christ that which was due to human sin, that he might be "just and the justifier of him that believeth." Go on, then, to tell everybody that the righteousness which saves you is the righteousness of God, not your own righteousness. There is no such thing as human righteousness: the two words make up a contradiction. Any righteousness that you could gain by your own works would be filthy rags at the best; and filthy rags are not righteousness. We have no personal merit, but we are justified by imputed righteousness. Make mention of the righteousness of Christ, which covers you from head to foot.

'Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head."

Declare the righteousness of God *as to a future state.* Declare that whatever Scripture speaks of the ungodly is true, and that God is righteous in it. Never mind the cavils and the inventions of this present age: God's character can never be harmed by these dreamers. Stand you by your God, and you may rest assured that time shall never change the essential truth that he is a holy and a righteous God, and will justify his ways to men.

But the time has gone, so I have only to say this: there is no other righteousness worth talking about; but if you will mention the righteousness of God, you will do much good. Make mention of the righteousness of God to convince men of their unrighteousness. Talk of it to win their admiration for the Lord Jesus. Oh, that everybody in this place knew how righteous the Lord Jesus was, not only in life, but in nature! Talk of the righteousness of God to show men the way of salvation. Tell them how the Lord laid help upon Christ, and that, while he is infinitely gracious, he is infinitely just. Then go on to point convinced sinners to where righteousness is to be had. He that believeth in the Lord Jesus shall find him made of God wisdom and righteousness.

Talk of that perfect righteousness also for the comfort of believers. Nothing will give them greater joy than to see how they are accounted righteous in the righteousness of Christ, and "accepted in the beloved."

"His only righteousness I show,
His saving truth proclaim;
'Tis all my business here below
To cry, 'Behold the Lamb!'"

Here is a happy vocation for the remainder of our sojourn here below. For ever and only make mention of God's righteousness. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxi.

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THE SERPENT'S SENTENCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 21ST, 1890, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."—Genesis iii. 14, 15.

SOME master in Israel who wanted to help the memories of his hearers has said that the three things to be preached above everything else are the three R's—Ruin, Redemption, and Regeneration. He spake wisely and well. How will men seek salvation if they do not feel their ruin? Where is there salvation save in the atoning blood? What is salvation but being created anew unto holiness? It is a noteworthy fact that, in Holy Scripture, there are three third chapters which deal with these things in the fullest manner. The third of Genesis reveals Ruin; the third of Romans teaches Redemption; the third of John sets forth Regeneration. Will our young friends be so good as to read those chapters through with care, at home? It is also worthy of mention that not only do each of these chapters teach its own R, but that it also teaches the other two R's. In this third of Genesis we have not only Ruin, but we have the Redeemer in "the seed of the woman," and we have Regeneration in the expression, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman." God's regenerating power creates a hatred of evil in the chosen seed. The same you will find in the other chapters; for the third of the Romans contains a fearful description of the sin and ruin of men; and in the third of John, after you have read, "Ye must be born again," not far from it you find it written, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have eternal life." Believe any of these great truths, and the rest follow as a necessary consequence. May we be helped this morning to learn something with regard to Ruin, Redemption, and Regeneration, from the passage now before us!

I pray you, never regard that story of the serpent as a fable. It

is said, nowadays, that it is a mere allegory. Yet there is nothing in the Book to mark where history ends and parable begins: it all runs on as actual history; and as Bishop Horsley forcibly remarks, "If any part of this narrative be allegorical, no part is naked matter of fact." It seems to me that if there was only an allegorical serpent, there was an allegorical paradise, with allegorical rivers, and allegorical trees; and the men and women were both allegorical, and the chapter which speaks of their creation is an allegory; and the only thing that exists is an allegorical heaven and an allegorical earth. If the Book of Genesis be an allegory, it is an allegory all through; and you have an allegorical Abraham, with allegorical circumcision, an allegorical Jacob and an allegorical Judah; and it is not unfair to push the theory onward, and impute to Judah allegorical descendants called Jews. But if you borrow any money of this race, you will not find them allegorical when you have to pay. It is idle to call the narrative of the Fall a mere allegory; one had better say at once that he does not believe the Book. There is something sane about that declaration, although it be folly: but to say, "Oh, yes, it is a venerable volume, and worthy to be studied; but it is padded out with many an allegory," is to say something which confutes itself, if you come to look into it. The Book is intended to be real history, and it contains some portions which, by the consent of everybody, are real history; but Moses could not be an historian, and yet set mere fables before us as a part of his story. To write a jumble of allegory and of fact causes a man to lose the character of a reliable historian, and we had better repudiate him at once. There was a real serpent, as there was a real paradise; there was a real Adam and Eve, who stood at the head of our race, and they really sinned, and our race is really fallen. Believe this.

When Satan, "that old serpent, the Devil, and Satan"—as the Apocalypse calls him—determined to tempt Eve, in order that he might destroy the race in which God evidently took much delight, he could not appear to the woman as a spirit. Spirits are not to be discerned by the eye; since a pure spirit is a thing which none of the outward senses of human beings can apprehend. An immaterial spirit must be invisible; and therefore he must embody himself in some way or other before he can be seen. That Satan has power to enter into living bodies is clear, for he did so upon a very large scale with regard to men in the days of Christ. He and his legions were even compelled to enter into the bodies of swine rather than be cast into the deep. Being compelled to have an embodiment, the master evil spirit perceived the serpent to be at that time among the most subtle of all creatures; and therefore he entered into the serpent as feeling that he would be most at home in that animal. Out of the serpent he spoke to Eve, as though the serpent itself had spoken. There was an actual and material serpent, but the evil spirit who is known as "the old serpent" was there, possessing the natural serpent with all his masterly cunning. Cruelly determining to lead the human race into sin, that he might thus ruin it and triumph over God, the fallen angel did not hesitate to assume a reptile form. Well might Milton make him say—

"O foul descent! that I, who erst contended
With gods to sit the highest, am now constrain'd
Into a beast; and, mix'd with bestial slime,
This essence to incarnate, and imbrute,
That to the height of deity aspired!"

Notice, carefully, that when the Lord comes to deal with the serpent, he does not question him as to his guilt, and the reason of it; and the reason is, perhaps, that the guilt of the arch-enemy was self-evident; or, better still, because the Lord had no design of mercy for him. He meant to make no covenant of grace for the devil or his angels; for he took not up angels, though he took up the seed of Abraham. In the infinite sovereignty of God he passed by the fallen angels, but he chose to raise fallen man. Those who cavil at the doctrine of election should answer this question: Why is it that God has left devils without hope, and yet has sent his Son to redeem mankind? Is not divine sovereignty manifested here? We can give no answer to the question, What is man that God thus visits him with distinguishing grace? save this—"He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion." Intending, therefore, no forgiveness to this evil spirit, the Lord put no questions to him. His interrogation of our first parents was a sign of mercy. When God chides with a man's conscience, it is with the view of blessing him. Do I speak to any man here whose sense of sin is aroused, who is accused by the Word of God, who feels the Spirit of God working within him as a spirit of bondage? You may be hopeful because it is so. If God had meant to destroy you, he would have left you alone, even as he left the serpent without a word of expostulation, and he would have passed sentence upon you speedily. The very rebukes of God are tokens of his favour towards men. With the serpent, that is, with the evil spirit, God had no upbraidings, but dealt at once by way of doom.

He pronounced a sentence upon the serpent, which, while it was terrible to him, is most encouraging to us; and so far as our first parents understood it, it must have been a sun of light to their dark, depressed souls. For many a year this was the lone star of believing hearts: this gospel of the serpent's doom. Satan was their enemy; he had done them wrong. He was also God's enemy, and God would fight against him, and call them into his battle. He would raise up One who would suffer, but would win the victory—One whom he calls "the seed of the woman." By him Satan's head would be bruised; and in that very fact, the race of man would be unspeakably blest.

Last Sabbath morning I introduced to you Immanuel—God with us, born of a virgin. We are now running on the same lines, and again I would speak of our Lord Jesus as the woman's seed, and extol him as espousing our quarrel, and undoing the mischief which the old serpent has wrought us. In him his believing people shall bruise Satan under their feet shortly.

We will consider the whole passage, and draw from it seven lessons. As there are so many, I cannot dwell upon any one of them at length; but must give you hints of the wealth of meaning which lies within

the words of these most instructive verses. With regard to our arch-enemy, we may here learn much.

First, notice THE INSTRUCTIVE FORM UNDER WHICH SATAN APPEARS. The text begins, "The Lord God said unto the serpent." Under the serpent form he beguiled the woman, and under that form he was condemned. He is a serpent still. He can go about among the weak and defenceless as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; but he is most at home as the embodiment of craft. The serpent was most *subtle*, and so is the evil one most cunning. You think you understand the ways of Satan; but you are mistaken. You have been tempted by him these thirty years, and you believe your experience can unravel all his plots. Ah, my brethren! he has been engaged in the work of tempting men for nearly six thousand years; and he is not only much older, but he is far more acute and more sagacious than you are. His ways are not easily found out; and though we are not ignorant of his devices, we know not which device he will next use. If we have successfully escaped his nets for forty years, the skilful fowler may even yet entangle us. We have need each day to cry, "Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." John writes of him in the Revelation as "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." He is more cunning than the wisest: how soon he entangled Solomon! He is stronger than the strongest: how fatally he overthrew Samson! Ay, and men after God's own heart, like David, have been led into most grievous sins by his seductions. We do not know where he now lurks, or from what quarter he will next shoot his arrows; but we may rest assured that he is always plotting mischief against the people of God, and he is working subtilely to effect their pollution. We may wisely enter into Paul's anxiety when he wrote to the Corinthians, "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." From the evil machinations of the subtle one, may the Lord deliver us!

A serpent is very *insinuating*. It can enter where another creature could not. Ever so small an opening makes room for a serpent, and it winds itself in without noise. Satan is very insinuating; and as he entered Paradise, so can he penetrate into the most secret and sacred places. He creeps into the church, watch though we may. He creeps into houses though sanctified by devotion. Have you never found him intruding into your closet during your prayer? There may seem to be no loophole, and yet there he is, where he was least expected. Has he not wound himself into your families? Has he not crept into your hearts? How can we keep him out? We watch against his attacks from without; but, behold, he has found a lodging-place within! Subtle and insinuating is Satan: he is a serpent indeed!

And how *venomous!* What poison one fang of the old serpent will throw into our moral system! Look around, and see how many have been poisoned with the desire for strong drink, with lust, with avarice, with pride, with anger, with unbelief. Fiery serpents are among us, and many die of their venom. If we tolerate the least sin, it is a burning drop in the veins of the soul. One touch of the fangs of this

serpent will work immeasurable sorrow, even if the soul be saved from death. It is only the power of God that keeps us from being destroyed by this viper. Had he his will, he is a spirit so malignant that no heir of heaven would survive. O God, keep thine own! Deliver us from the evil one!

In all probability the reptile called the serpent was a nobler creature before the Fall than now. The words of our text, so far as they literally concern the serpent, threaten that a change would be wrought in him. It has been a sort of speculative opinion that the creature either had wings, or was able to move without creeping upon the earth as it now does. Of that we know nothing; but assuredly the serpent is a hated thing, with which manhood is at war, and its form and habit typify all that is mean and cunning. There is nothing noble, nothing brave, nothing true about the idea of a serpent. Satan was among the first-born of the morning, a swift and shining servant of God; but he transgressed against his Sovereign and fell, and now he is nothing but a serpent—malignant, base, cunning, and untrue. He is fitly figured by "the wily snake." "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John viii. 44). He goes out to deceive the nations (Rev. xx. 8). He works signs and lying wonders (2 Thess. ii. 9). He lays snares, and takes men captive (2 Tim. ii. 26). Keep before your minds the form of a serpent, and remember that after this manner Satan will attack you. Only let me soften your fears with the sight of another serpent: the serpent of brass lifted upon a pole brought life to those whom evil serpents had injured. It seems to me a wonder of condescending grace that our Lord Jesus could allow himself to be symbolized by a form which had been assumed by the great enemy of souls. Yes, there was the brazen serpent lifted high upon a pole, and they that looked, though bitten by fiery serpents, lived. Even thus is Jesus on the cross the sure remedy for sin of every kind. Look out with all your eyes of caution for the old serpent, the devil; but at the same time look up with all your eyes of faith to him who was made a curse for us that we might live.

II. So much for the first lesson, now for the second. Observe THE MEMORABLE FACT AS TO SATAN'S CONDITION. "The Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed"; and the curse was made emphatic and superlative. He with whom we have to contend has the curse of God upon him even now. God has blessed his people, but he has cursed their great enemy. The curse of God blights and blasts, even as in the case of the fruitless fig-tree, which, beneath the sentence of the Lord Jesus, withered away. The curse of God has fallen upon that foul spirit who represents evil: it could not justly be otherwise. This is his shame and your strength. The next time you are fighting with Apollyon, here is a keen shaft to hurl at him. Tell him he is accursed of God; and what has he to do with those whom the Lord has blessed? He whom God blesses is blessed, but he whom God curses is cursed indeed. Upon all the power of sin and error, yea, upon Satan himself, who is the ringleader in evil

things, the curse of God abideth; and this is prophetic of their overthrow. The truth shall conquer, holiness shall overcome. Falsehood and wrong bear the brand of Cain upon their brow, and they shall wither from the root.

Satan was cursed with reference to us. Our fall has brought him no gain, but an increase of divine displeasure, of disappointment, and envy. He was under God's wrath before, but now the Lord saith concerning him, "Thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field." Though there cometh pain and groaning upon all the lower creation through man's sin, there shall come upon the old serpent a far more exceeding measure of the curse, because he has dared to lead into revolt the race of man. Who will willingly be the slave of a tyrant whom the Lord has cursed?

Not only Satan, but every form of sin, is under the curse. The tempter would make you think that some shapes of sin are blessed; but this is false. All sin has a curse attached to it. Keep far from it. Is it false doctrine? It is accursed. Is it living in wantonness and carnal pleasure? It is accursed. Touch it not. You cannot do wrong without defiling yourself with that which God has cursed. You may imagine that you will gain many good things by yielding a little to sin; but this is a lie of the adversary: evil is loss and ruin. The curse which God pronounced on the serpent is pronounced on the whole of his seed, and everything that is impure, untruthful, and unholy lies under the ban of God.

Brethren, if for Christ's sake we should suffer poverty, or reproach, or slander, or even death, there would be a blessing in it all; but if by means of doing evil we should rise to wealth, honour, and ease, we should find in all our gains a burning curse. Who prizes gold with the curse upon it? It is cankered, and will eat into the soul. God knows what is cursed, and what is blessed; and we may well believe his declaration that evil is meaner than the brutes, and more sensual than the wild beasts of the field. All this is a call to escape from the ways of sin. Tremble lest ye be found under the curse; and hasten to flee to him who can turn the curse into a blessing, even Jesus, who bore our sins in his own body on the tree, and so bore away the curse from all believers.

The memorable fact that Satan and the power of evil are under the curse should hearten us in our conflict with spiritual wickednesses. We can overcome them, for the curse of the Lord has gone forth against them.

III. For a third lesson, note THE REMARKABLE PROSTRATION which fell upon the serpent: "Upon thy belly shalt thou go." So does the serpent move, and so doth evil labour to make progress. Satan moves always as a fallen one: not with the dignity of holiness, but grovelling low. God has put upon his every movement the indication that he is no longer great and wise. The movements of the Prince of darkness are base and sensual:—"Upon thy belly shalt thou go." His seed also take to the same posture in going. I have seen the foes of the truth contending against the faith of God, and I have marked their policies, their plots, and their plans; and I have said to myself, "Verily, it is written, Upon thy belly shalt thou go." Beings

engaged in evil designs have no other way of going, but with tricks, devices, concealments, double meanings. When men deny the Scriptures and the truth of God, they always go to work in an underhand, mean, and serpentine style: "Upon thy belly shalt thou go." If guilty man begins to plot for his own advantage, scheme for his own glory, and aim at perverting the truth, you will notice that he never takes a bold, open, manly stand, but he dodges, he conceals, he twists and shifts: "Upon thy belly shalt thou go." Sin is a mean and despicable thing. The greatest potentate of evil was here doomed to cringe and crawl, and his seed have never forgotten their father's posture.

All the objects of the powers of evil are grovelling. What do they seek after? When men forsake the way of holiness, they rush after polluted and idle amusements. What is there in the world's pleasure which is ennobling? Still is carnal mirth a grovelling thing: "Upon thy belly shalt thou go." A professing man gives up the separated way, and enters upon modern society, and he no longer walks with God. What is his general course? Within a short time we find him careless of all religion, and tolerant of licentiousness. It is ever so: "Upon thy belly shalt thou go." If you give way to evil, you shall go down, down, down, till your god is your belly, and you glory in your shame. If a man would be great, let him serve God. If a man would rise to the angels, ay, rise to God, let him obey the command of his Maker. But if he wishes to degrade himself below the adder, which "glides obscure through bush and brake," his easy method is to follow Satan, and rebel against the Most High.

IV. Observe, in the fourth place, THE PERPETUAL DEGRADATION put upon the serpent: "And dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." Satan is now to live a defeated life, for such is the force of the expression, "His enemies shall lick the dust." It signifies that they are utterly defeated. So Satan all his life long exists as a conquered and chained enemy: his power is broken, and he knows it well. He is defeated as to the whole of his great scheme, and he is to be defeated in the details of it all the days of his life. When he met our Lord in the wilderness, he crept upon his belly with serpentine temptations; but our Lord by his holiness made him eat dust! How often was he in our Lord's lifetime made to feel that his conqueror had come! He cringed before him, and implored that he might not be tormented before his time. When he saw the Lord Jesus upon the cross, having planned, as he thought, to crush him by death, he began to dread defeat. When he heard him cry, "It is finished," and felt his iron heel upon his head, he knew, to his eternal horror, that he had only fashioned for the Christ an opportunity of redeeming mankind. What a mouthful of dust he had to eat in that day! None more wretched in the universe than Satan, whose works the bleeding Saviour had destroyed. It was a day of bitter defeat for the enemy when our Lord rose from the dead. The old serpent had watched the pale corpse; but when he saw it live, and when the angel rolled away the stone, and Jesus, the Christ, came forth to die no more, I warrant you the serpent ate the dust that day. And when the apostles stood forth—men whom Satan despised, humble fishermen—and the Holy

Ghost came down upon them; again it was fulfilled, "Dust shalt thou eat." When the nations were converted, and the idols were broken, and the truth mightily prevailed; then did Satan remember the words, "Dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." He has more humiliation yet to come. Arise, and preach Christ and win souls, and the great enemy of souls shall find his power diminished, and his name abhorred, and again he shall lick the dust.

For ever dust shall be the serpent's meat, for what he does gain always disappoints him. He thought he had obtained a great advantage when he won the woman to disobedience; but he had made a rod for his own back, since her seed would become his eternal antagonist. The fall of man led up to the incarnation and the atonement; and by these Satan is thrown down. By man has come the resurrection, and so the defeat of death, who was first-born of hell. The victory of the devil in Eden is blotted out by the victory of Jesus at Calvary.

If Satan ever knows pleasure at all, it is of the foulest and most unsatisfactory kind: dust is his meat. There is nothing satisfying in the pleasures of rebellion. He remains a disappointed, restless being. The most cunning error which he invents, and sustains by philosophy, is no more than dust. His whole cause, for which he has laboured these thousands of years with a horrible perseverance—his whole cause, I say—will dissolve into dust, and will be blown away as smoke. Still doth he feed himself upon dust. Let those who are servants of Satan know assuredly that, as they are living in sin, they will have to eat at their father's table, and learn the emptiness of all the pleasures of sin, and the worthlessness of all the treasures of evil. Everything that sin can bring you is just so much dust—foul eating, insufficient, clogging, killing. Though you hoard up wealth, gold is nothing but dust to a dying man. Though you gain all earthly honour, it, too, dissolves in dust. This is the misery of that great spirit who is called the Prince of darkness, that he must eat dust all his days. But what misery it must be to be only some poor subject in that unhallowed kingdom, and still to be doomed to the same loathsome fare! "Dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." Note that right well: and may God deliver you from such feeding!

V. Let us, in the next place, think upon THE CEASELESS WAR with which God threatens the serpent: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." He reckoned upon an easy conquest, and had apparently gained it; but he would find his victim become his antagonist, and at length his conqueror. Satan can never know peace: he seeketh rest and findeth none. When he talked to that woman with his guileful words of flattery, he thought he had made a friend of her. The charming creature in whom God had embodied the perfection of beauty, had he not seduced her from obedience to the great King? Had he not used her as the instrument to make her husband a traitor to his God? They were great friends—those two. She felt, in the moment that she took the fruit, that she owed much to the serpent for giving her the gentle hint whereby she was led to find the opening of her eyes, and the uplifting of her nature to be as God. How grievously was she

deceived! Nor was the serpent to find himself advantaged. The league was broken, and the deceiver and his victim were at enmity. God declares most solemnly, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman:" God will see that there be no peace. There is a war to be waged between Satan and the woman's seed, so long as the world stands. Sometimes it looks as if there was going to be peace; for the world flatters the church, and the church seeks to conform herself to the world. As before Noah's flood the sons of God and the daughters of men were joined in unhallowed alliance, so again and again there have been attempts at truce. But peace there cannot be. To-day Satan tempts the ministers of Christ to soften down the gospel, adapt it to the age, and make it popular; and he also labours to throw down the division between the church and the world. "Fill up the gulf!" says he; "Cover it over like an old sewer, and forget that it ever existed!" Thus he speaks like the sinner in the Proverbs: "Cast in thy lot among us, let us all have one purse." But mark this, all ye that hear me—though all the pulpits should be captured, and though it should seem that the very elect were deceived, yet God will not leave himself without witness, but will find, somewhere or other, some chosen ones of the seed of the woman to carry on the holy war even to the end. Jehovah hath laid his hand upon his throne, and he has sworn to have war with evil from generation to generation. See how it was in Israel when the high-priest of God, even Eli, winked at sin, when his own sons, as priests, committed iniquity at the tabernacle door; and all Israel was thus made to do evil. Would not the lamp of truth go out? Would not the worship of the Lord be utterly abhorred? Ah, no! a little child was brought by his mother into the tabernacle to be the servant of the Lord, and in him the Lord found a champion. In the night did God call Samuel; and he answered, "Here am I." This Samuel stood before the Lord, and gave forth prophecies which made both the ears of him that heard thereof to tingle, and the Lord was again great in Israel. Do not tremble for the ark of the Lord. God will not suffer the old serpent to spread his slime over all things. Satan's throne shall always be opposed.

This enmity is to be kept up by God himself. He said, "*I will put* enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." See here the church of God announced in this verse! You have not only the gospel here, but the church also. Christ, the seed of the woman, is the head; and all who are in Christ are his body; he and they are the one seed. In these words the Lord set up the church which continues to this day; a seed which is opposed to Satan, and to evil; a seed which will remain, by the power of the Spirit of God, waging constant war with the powers of evil. Do we belong to that seed? In this seed there is a deep-seated hatred to everything that is false and evil. God will see that this seed shall never yield to the power of evil; for still it shall stand true, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman." As long as there is false doctrine, there shall be a protesting reformer; as long as there is any form of wickedness extant, there shall be a witness born from on high to contend with it. This seed is born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of the Spirit of God, who dwells in the true seed of the

woman; and this seed shall be valiant for the Lord of hosts till the last enemy shall be destroyed.

Which side are you on, my friend, this morning? I put the question very pointedly to everyone here: Are you born from above? That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit; and only this last is the true seed of the woman.

VI. Sixthly, observe that we see in the text THE LIMITED ACHIEVEMENT of the old serpent. What will he accomplish by all his schemes? "Thou shalt bruise his heel." That is all. This is after the serpent's manner. Satan is "an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward." If he dares not attack you openly, he will assail you from behind. He is as a snake in the grass, biting at the heel of the traveller. The result of Satan's six thousand years of cunning and enmity is, that he has bruised the heel of his victim.

That bruised heel is painful enough. Behold our Lord in his human nature sore bruised: he was betrayed, bound, accused, buffeted, scourged, spit upon. He was nailed to the cross; he hung there in thirst and fever, and darkness and desertion. They pierced his hands and his feet; and last, they set his heart abroach, and forthwith there flowed from it both blood and water. Satan by death bruised the heel of the woman's seed. It is a sad business; but when our Lord thought of the resurrection, the salvation of his chosen, and the conquest of the world, it seemed to him to be a light thing; for "he endured the cross, despising the shame."

Behold the seed of the woman as further comprehending all the Lord's believing people! Satan has bruised their heel to the utmost of his power. Through the long persecutions he has been assailing the heel of the church. Many of the saints the devil cast into prison, and others he caused to be tortured for Christ's sake; but their souls were not conquered. He could only bruise their heel, their spirit soared out of his reach. And you, to-day, when tempted and tried, and cast down, may be comforted because your Head is not hurt, for Jesus reigns in heaven. The waters are black, and they cover the body, but our Head is above the billows, and the body is safe. The serpent's bruises stay in the heel, and spread no further. The suffering of the church, however great, is but a light affliction, not worthy to be compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Thank God, the enemy can only bruise your heel.

The cause of God and truth in the world may, by Satan's subtle power, be for a while sadly bruised as to the heel of its progress, but it cannot be wounded in the heart of its truth. The kingdom advances painfully, because of the bruised heel; but it fails not, but even when lame it takes the prey. Some doctrine which, possibly, may have been stated in a questionable manner is more fully studied, more carefully made known; and so even the heel-bruise works for good. Though the church of God may be under a cloud for a time, yet she will break out with all the greater splendour before long.

"Thou shalt bruise his heel." Make the best thou canst of it, Satan, it does not come to much! All that thou art at thy greatest is but a heel-nibbler, and nothing more. Thou art not allowed to poison the

heel, but only to bruise it. Though the man of God walks limpingly a while, and suffers where the fangs have been, yet, leaning on his Beloved, he comes up from the wilderness without fail, and forgetting the bruises of his heel, he rejoices in the triumphs of his glorious Head.

VII. Now we come to the seventh lesson. We have marked the limited triumph of Satan, and we now observe HIS FINAL DOOM. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head." Here is the end of the great conflict. Satan, who heads the powers of evil in the world, is to fight it out with all his cunning and strength, and he is so far to succeed as to bruise the heel of the champion with whom he fights; but in the end the seed of the woman is to bruise his head. This was accomplished when the Lord Jesus died, and by dying honoured the law, put away sin, slew death, and defeated hell. When the great Substitute drank the cup of wrath to its utmost dregs for every believing soul, when he unhinged the gate of the sepulchre and carried it away, as Samson carried the gates of Gaza—post, and bar, and all; when he opened the doorways of heaven and led captivity captive; then, indeed the head of the dragon was broken. What can Satan now do? Is not the accuser of the brethren cast down? He is still doing his little best in bitterness and malice; but the Christ hath crushed him. Yes, the very Christ who "was despised and rejected of men," the man of the thorn crown and the marred visage, the man of bleeding shoulders and pierced hands and feet, the man who was born of a virgin, the seed of the woman, hath broken the power of the enemy. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! He hath cast down the Prince of darkness from his high places! Did he not himself say, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven"? He hath bruised the serpent's head.

This is done in all believers also, and shall be done yet more effectually. Brethren, in that day when the Holy Spirit led us to trust in the Lord Jesus, we bruised the serpent's head. He had been accustomed to command, and we to obey, and thus sin had dominion over us; but as soon as ever we believed in Christ, that dominion was ended, and Dagon fell before the ark of the Lord. I see the serpent rise above me. This great python, with opened jaws, gapes upon me as though he would swallow me up quick. But I am not afraid. O serpent, I have bruised thy head in Christ Jesus my Lord; for I, too, am of the seed of the woman! The serpent cannot lift himself against the chosen seed. What can he do with a broken head? He knows that God has decreed that every believer shall triumph over him. It is written, "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Hallelujah! once again.

This bruise upon the head of the evil is a mortal stroke. If he had been bruised upon the tail, or upon the neck, he might have survived; but the Lord shall utterly slay the kingdom of evil, and crush out its power. Reigning evil shall cease; and grace shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life. There shall be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Christ himself, the seed of the woman, shall come a second time, and he shall reign on

earth amongst his ancients gloriously. Then shall he ride forth prosperously, because of truth and righteousness: and his right hand shall exalt his people. His foot shall tread down their enemy. May you and I be among the happy throng that shall salute the Seed of the woman in his second advent! May we reign with him in that day! By the Seed of the woman is Paradise restored to us, and all the mischief of the fall is undone: for he restoreth that which he took not away.

And now, my hearer, which side are you on? Do any of you think that ye shall not surely die? You talk like your father, and his children you are. Do any of you say, God is a hard governor? Has he said, "Ye shall not eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden"? You are like your own father in this also. And do you move in snaky, cunning ways? Are you given to craft and policy? Dare you tell a lie, and then forge another to prop up the first? You are of your father the devil, for his works you do. Are you opposed to God and truth and righteousness? and do you cry out for what is called "liberty," that is, licentiousness and permission to indulge your own passions? Then you are on the evil side. Do you aspire to know good and evil? Young man, would you go into evil haunts to see vice, and learn its ways? Do you long to see "life," as they call it? Are you familiar with the sensual and the profane? Ah! then you are listening to that old deceiver, who allures you into his deadly nets: I pray you, escape from his seductions.

Is it well with you? Do you look to Jesus, the seed of the woman? Are you trusting in him to break the power of the enemy? Do you wish the power of sin to be broken in yourself? Do you desire to have the very head of it crushed to powder? Do you pine to be free from sin, and holy as God is holy? Are you trusting in Jesus to have this same thing wrought in you? Ah! then you are on the conquering side. Victory shall be yours through the blood of the Lamb.

Thus have we found much gospel in the wonderful sentence pronounced upon that old serpent, the devil; but yet we have only skimmed the surface. To the eternal God be glory, world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—917, 470, 477.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

EXPERIENCE AND ASSURANCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."—Psalm lxiii. 7.

In their time of trouble the children of God turn to their Father. It is according to their new-born nature to seek him from whom it came. The believing heart is like the needle in the compass: you may turn it round with your finger east and west, but when you withdraw the pressure, it will, beyond all doubt, tremble backward towards its pole. With God the regenerate heart is in its proper position. A mystic something draws the new life towards the source from whence it came. We may, alas! by the force of temptation, or by the demands of business, or by an overpowering lethargy, become indifferent to our highest love; but this cannot long continue: we can never rest except in God. The winds of trouble blow the dove of our soul back to the ark. Our heart repents of its wanderings when they bring it into a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. Then we long after divine refreshments, and cannot be quiet till we have them. Then we cry, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee"!

The soul, in coming back to God, will be greatly helped by meditation. Hence the Psalmist says, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." The soul feasts when it meditates. I am afraid these eager days leave little space for meditation; yet is there no exercise more nourishing to faith, and love, and all the graces. David says, "I remember thee; I meditate on thee." A transient thought of God may bless us largely, even as a touch of the hem of the Saviour's garment healed a woman of her plague; but to meditate upon him is, as it were, to lean our head upon his bosom, and enjoy full fellowship in his love. Oh, for more meditation! It would mean more grace, more joy. The photographer can take an instantaneous photograph; and so can we, by ejaculatory prayer and vehement desire, obtain immediate help from heaven; but in a certain state of the atmosphere the object needs longer exposure—needs, in fact, that its image should

rest longer upon the sensitive plate before it will completely imprint itself thereon. Meditation does, as it were, set the Lord long before the soul, so that it receives his image more completely. Happy is he who can say, "I have set the Lord always before me"!

Thoughts of God are as when a man climbs a hill, looks upon a landscape, and cries out exultingly, "How beautiful is this scenery!" But if you would have a figure of meditation, you must see that man standing on the hill-top for a long space of time, and marking the features of the landscape. See, yonder is the spire of a village church! Mark the cottages nestling around it! There flows a river; and, hard by, a broad sheet of water, like a looking-glass, reflects the sun. Mark the distant range of hills, and the woods and wilds which lie between. Note well the valley bronzed with a thousand fields of corn, divided like a garden by hedge-rows. Such a view as this is instructive, and abides in the memory. He understands the country best who has seen most of it; and we know the Lord, by his Spirit, far better by quiet meditation than by any other means. We not only remember our God once; but we remember, and remember, and remember, and remember again, till memory flowers into meditation. Thoughts of God crop the herbage, but meditation chews the cud; and it is the chewing of the cud which yields nourishment. Oh, that you and I may often cheer our sleepless hours by heavenly meditations; for thus shall the pure in heart see their God, and thus shall they enter into the closest fellowship with him.

Among our subjects for meditation should be God's gracious dealings with us. David meditated upon his whole life in the light of its connection with God. He read his diary through, and specially dwelt upon the points wherein he had come into contact with the Invisible and the Infinite. He remembered the help he had received from Omnipotence. He knew God best by special times of gracious aid. After all, it is not what we read in the Book; but what we feel in the heart which actually gives us our best acquaintance with God. A hundred biographies of other men will not make so much impression upon us as the knowing of God in our own personal experience. If we can say of him, "Thou hast been my help," we shall meditate upon him to good purpose.

Once more: *when the heart comes back to God*, riding in the golden chariot of meditation, *the natural instinct is to speak to him.* Hence my text is not only the word *of* God, but a word *with* God. The Psalmist does not direct the words of the text to us, but to God himself: "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." Beloved, it is a delightful thing to converse with God. Do you indulge this habit? If the Lord be your Father, should you not, as a child, speak with him day by day? If you are married to Christ, should not the spouse speak with her Well-beloved? It were very strange if she did not. Private devotion ought to be a dialogue between the soul and God: by the Scripture the Lord speaks to us, and by prayer we speak to him. Sometimes, you know, in conversation with a friend, you have not much to say. Very well; you listen while your friend speaks. When prayer is not urgent, read your Bible, and hear what God the Lord shall speak; and

when you have heard his voice, you will usually find it in your heart to pray unto him. If the prayer be soon over, because you have expressed all your thoughts, then let the Lord speak again, and do you hearken diligently. But do speak to the Lord. Realize his presence, and then speak to him as a man speaketh with his friend. God has no dumb children, but he has some who hold their tongues to a fault when they are with him. I fear that these same people use their tongues to a fault when they are away from him. O brother, speak with God! this is the noblest use of speech. If half our talk with men were silenced, and our talks with God were multiplied ten times, it would be well. May I ask a question of every professed Christian? Have you spoken with God this morning? Do you allow a day to pass without converse with God? Can it be right for us to treat the Lord with mute indifference? No; let us often turn our hearts and our lips heavenward, and say, "Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name." Does not our Lord love to hear us speak? Listen to his loving appeal in the sacred Canticle: "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely."

With this as a preface, I now invite you to the text itself, which is a stanza of David's song unto the Lord. "Because thou hast been my help"—This is *experience*. "Therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice"—this is *expectation*, or, viewing it in a still brighter light, "I will rejoice"—this is *assurance*. Here are three subjects to dwell upon. God help us to climb these three rounds of the ladder of light: experience, expectation, full assurance! If we stop at the top when we get there, it may not be amiss; but if we have to begin again, let us rehearse matters in the same order—more experience, clearer expectation, and fuller assurance.

I. First, then, EXPERIENCE: "Thou hast been my help." Experience is the child of faith, and, strange to say, experience is the nurse of faith. No man can expect to experience the fulfilment of the promise till he believes the promise; but they believe the promise best who have had most experience of God's faithfulness.

David had experienced divine help. He distinctly traced many of his deliverances to divine help. He says, "*Thou* hast been my help." David did not ascribe his success in life to a powerful patron, for he had none. I have heard men sigh for the bondage of patronage. One has cried, "If I were taken up by some great man, I should succeed in life." David had no patronage; but, on the contrary, encountered strong opposition. His brothers pushed him into the rear, and even his father kept him minding the sheep. In after life Jonathan was his friend, but he was not his patron; for that generous prince always felt that David was his superior. If you have God for your friend, you need not cringe before great men; for you shall joyfully say unto the Lord, "Thou hast been my help." Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm; but blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.

Neither does David ascribe his success in life to himself. There is no doubt that he was a man of genius, cast in a poetic mould; and

it is also clear that he was a valiant man, born for deeds of daring and high enterprise. He was also a man of judgment and counsel, and as apt for government in peace as in war. With all his faults, there is no more royal character upon the page of Scripture than David, King of Israel. But he does not sacrifice to his own sword, or magnify his own bow. We read no word of his about his being a self-made man; nay, rather, he sings, "It is God that subdueth the people under me." Brethren, have there not been instances in your lives, in which the Lord has evidently interposed to help you? I can see his hand clearly in places wherein no other help would have been sufficient. If anyone had to sketch my life, he could not do it fully, unless I were, from my own secret thoughts, to supply certain gaps. Without God the believer's life is inexplicable. The Romans used to speak of *Deus ex machinâ;* God appearing in an unexpected manner in the midst of a history to rescue the hero, and change the scene. This is no figure of speech in the life of faith. Every now and then we have witnessed a distinct interposition, a stretching out of the divine hand, an inroad of the supernatural. To us has it been true, "He bowed the heavens also, and came down." Others might think our experience fanatical, if we were to tell it as we see it; but this we cannot help. To us it has been a real manifestation of the divine thoughtfulness on our behalf. Looking back upon our lives, we cannot help saying deliberately, and as cool statement of fact—The Lord has been our help. There, and there, and there, we mark certain turning-points in our life which cannot be accounted for to our own minds on any other theory than that here the Creator came into contact with his creature, the Redeemer stooped over his redeemed, and the Comforter wrought upon the soul which he indwelt. Yes, "O triune Jehovah, thou hast been my help!" David felt it was so, and he avowed it without hesitation.

Furthermore, these words imply that *David had often experienced this help.* He does not make this statement in reference to one solitary incident in his life, or he would have said, "Thou wast once my help"; but he sees a continuity in the lovingkindness of the Lord his God. He means, "Thou hast all along been my help." When he was a youth, and kept his father's flock, there came a lion and took a lamb out of his flock, and he, with dauntless courage, rushed upon the monster and saved the lamb from between his jaws. Another day a bear pounced on one of his helpless charge, and the brave youth killed it. God helped him in those days of solitude in the wilderness. None saw his daring deeds; but he communed with God, and wrought bravely, so as to prepare himself to be the shepherd and deliverer of the Lord's own flock. In his early youth the Lord was his strength and his song.

Anon, he was taken away from solitude, and introduced into public life, and the Lord was his help. He had a strange introduction to the world; I might almost say that he was slung out into public life like a stone from his own sling. A gigantic Philistine stalked before the hosts of Israel, defying the servants of God to single conflict. Young David undertook to answer the champion's defiance; and then was fulfilled his brave word to King Saul, "Thy servant slew both the

lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them." He ran to him in the name of the Lord Jehovah, the God of Israel, whom he had defied; and presently he returned to Saul bearing the braggart's gory head. "Because thou hast been my help," was David's way of accounting for his slaying the lion, and the bear, and the giant.

In after life, David had to attend in the court of envious Saul, and he behaved himself wisely there. He would confess to the Lord the reason for his wise behaviour in these words, "Because thou hast been my help." Put upon difficult enterprises, he achieved them; jealously envied by the king, he gave him no ground for a charge; for God was his help. Driven at length into exile, to become the leader of a band of men; hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, his life was still preserved: the Lord was his help. While yet a wanderer, he met with a great heart-breaking trouble. While he had been away from Ziklag, where his men were in residence, a band of marauders came upon the city, took the women and children captive, and burned the city with fire. When he and his band came back to the place, each man had to grieve over his ruined home and stolen substance, and wife and family carried off. The rough men spake of stoning David, for their hearts were bitter with a great sorrow. Then we read that "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God," and very soon his mourning was turned into dancing; the captives were recovered, the spoil was reclaimed, and the men-at-arms were glad. Truly David could say, "Thou hast been my help."

I cannot go through all the life of David, but I hope you are familiar with it. In doing his duty as patriot and king, God was his help, and enabled him to walk uprightly in his government. In his sufferings the Lord was his help, and enabled him to be calm and brave. In the time of danger God was his help, and kept him from the hand of the enemy. And now, in this psalm, though David is in the wilderness of Judah, and probably hunted by his own son, yet he sings unto the Lord, "Thou hast been my help." Beloved friends, I do not want you to stop with David any longer. I beg you, now, to come nearer home, and review your own lives. I cannot, of course, give a sketch of the histories of all here assembled, but many of them will run on this wise:—as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, your life was a hard fight in the beginning, and many a time you were ready to perish. Perhaps you began very low down in the scale, and when you were about to rise, misfortune dragged you down. Many things were against you, but the Lord was your help. In your own person you have suffered sickness; but when you have tossed upon the bed, in great anguish, God has been your help. You have experienced trial in your family. There are graves in the cemetery which you will never forget; half your heart lies buried beneath the sod. Yet the Lord has been your help. When you hoped, by industry, to succeed, the times suddenly turned and swept away your gains. It seemed as if you could not prosper. You can say to-day, "I was brought low, and the Lord helped me." You are not in the workhouse; you have not been through the bankruptcy court; you still find that promise true, "Thy bread shall be given

thee, and thy waters shall be sure." You joyfully say this day, "O Lord, thou hast been my help." As for me, the very spot on which I stand bears witness to the lovingkindnesses of the Lord. On this platform I have endured deep distress of mind while preaching to you, and I have feared lest I should not be able to speak aright in the name of the Lord; but now, concerning these thirty-seven years of my ministry, I joyfully say, "Thou hast been my help." Most of you, in your various walks of life, will have had occasion, again and again, to bless the Lord, who has been your help.

These helps rendered to David had been very choice ones. He had often been helped in special ways. God had taken great care of him. He was the favourite of Providence, and the darling of heaven. Has it not been so with some of you? Have you not enjoyed choice morsels of experience? Are there not incidents in your life which you could scarcely tell, lest the hearer should smile at your credulity, and you should be found casting pearls before swine? To some of us most special mercies have been vouchsafed, and we have treasured them as choice things. I was rather astonished to learn that in the Hebrew the help is expressed by much the same word which is used in Genesis to describe the position of woman to man. God made Eve to be a helpmeet for Adam; and here the Almighty God has been to us as suitable a help as the helpmeet he made for man. Some of us have a dear one who has been our best earthly help, and that in the best and happiest manner conceivable—a help exactly answering to our heart's needs. David had found in his God a help of the kind which he needed—a help tenderly, wisely, divinely suited for his every want. The Lord had answered to his servant's wants and desires, and had been his very present help, yielding wisdom for his folly, and power for his weakness, and comfort for his sorrow. Wonder of wonders, that God the omnipotent and almighty should become a help in all things meet for man! Is not this a joyous thing? Have we not found it so? Confess this tender fact to your God, and rejoice every day in the quiet of your own soul, saying, "Thou hast been my help."

God has been to us a very timely help. Has he not appeared at the very nick of time? Had there been another moment's delay, it had been all over with us; but in our extremity the Lord found his opportunity. How speedily he came—

> "On cherub and on cherubim
> Full royally he rode,
> And on the wings of mighty wind
> Came flying all abroad.
>
> And so deliver'd he my soul:
> Who is a rock but he?
> He liveth—Blessed be my Rock!
> My God exalted be!"

Just when our own life ebbed out, the divine life flowed in; just when joy died within us, hope was born, and our spirit revived.

God's help has also been continuous to us. Though at the present moment there may seem to be a break, and we are in the wilderness of Judah, where the Lord is rather thirsted for than seen, yet this is only

an apparent break. Beloved, hitherto there has been no pause in the goodness of God to us. In the time of our darkness we could not see the link; but, looking back, we can see it now. Life has been to us a continuous chain of love, with every link well forged upon the anvil of power by the hammer of wisdom. The Lord has never failed us. Did he not say, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"? and has it not been so? Up hill and down dale, in the dark and in the light, in summer and in winter, the constancy of God's help has been proved. His faithfulness is a fountain of delight to us. The Lord has always been our help.

Observe also that *the Lord has granted us educative mercy*. David says, "Because thou hast been my *help*." He says not, that he has wrought everything for us, but he has set us working also. You see, if you do a thing for a man, it is well; but if you help him to do it, it may be better for him, for thus he learns the way. It is true that in many deeds of grace, the Lord does not help, but he does all the work himself. He chose us before we chose him, and without our choice of him he quickened us. We could not help in our own quickening. He renewed us: we could not help in our own renewal. He, by his own power, made us new creatures and changed our hearts, and gave us his Holy Spirit: we could not help in this, for this must be God's own unaided work. God made the grass, the grass did not help in its own creation; but God helps the grass to grow, and the grass itself grows by the divine power. In the same manner, after we have come to spiritual life, then God helps us. Donne says, "God hath not left me to myself, he hath come to my succour, he hath been my help: but then, God hath not left out myself; he hath been my help, but he hath left something for me to do with him, and by his help." We work because he makes us work, and helps us in it. We bring forth fruit as branches of the vine, but he supplies the sap; so that he says, "From me is thy fruit found." Lord, thou hast been my help: I began with stammering a few sentences for thee; but thou hast opened my mouth to show forth thy praise. Did you not begin with a faint confession of Christ? and now you dare to stand in the front of the battle. The Lord has so helped you that you have been trained for the conflict: "He teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." Help not only promotes the work, but it blesses the man himself by stimulating his powers and developing them. Blessed be the name of the Lord, he has not carried us like babes; but he has taught us to walk with him as men, and we are the stronger because we can say, "Thou hast been my help."

I close this first head when I have noticed *the personal experience* of the text: "Because thou hast been *my* help." Oh, I like that word *my!* "*My* help." If David had said, "Because thou wast Abraham's help," there would have been good argument in it; for the experience of another man ought to encourage our faith. Suppose he had said, "Because thou wast Jacob's help," or "Moses' help," it would have been good reasoning. But, oh, it strikes more surely and comes more closely home to a man's heart when he can say, "Because thou hast been *my* help." An infidel once sneered at a poor woman, and said, "How do you know the Bible is true?" She answered, "I have experienced

the truth of it." He replied, "Your experience! That is nothing to me." "No," she said, "that is very likely; but it is everything to me." And so it is. My experience may not convince another man, but my experience has rooted, grounded, and settled myself. "But," says one, "Surely, you are open to conviction?" Yes, I am always open to conviction; but there are some things upon which no man, nor angel, nor devil, will ever alter my convictions already formed. There are a few things which we know: I mean things which we have experienced. If we have experienced the truth of them, then we are past all argument to the contrary; we are sure and certain, fixed and rooted.

It seems to me that there are two books which a Christian man ought to study: the one is this big Book, the inspired Word of God; the other is the little book of his own life. If the believer lives long enough he will write into that little book all that there is in the great Book, only he will change the tense. When the great Book saith, "I will do this, and I will do that," we shall find in the little book, "God hath done so and so. In my own case the promise has been fulfilled." The little book will be the echo of the inspired volume, the record of the fact that the Lord has done according to his word of promise. Thus experience becomes a stay and a strength to the child of God in times of darkness or controversy. God grant that you may go on writing up your personal memoir, and thus confirming the witness of the Spirit! Are not our lives the proof of God's faithfulness? Is not this the sum and substance of them, "Thou hast been my help"?

II. And now, secondly, EXPECTATION. David naturally expected that as God *had been* his help, so he *would be* his help. I like a text which has a "because" in it followed up with a "therefore." The text becomes a syllogism, an argument, a sure statement: because such and such a thing is fact, therefore such another thing must be fact. God, who *has* helped us, *will* help us. Experience becomes argument, and the argument carries conviction with it.

What we have experienced of God's goodness is a revelation of himself: God's actions are himself in motion. If, then, we have experienced God's power, he is powerful; and we know that anything is possible to him. If I have experienced his acts of faithfulness, I conclude that he is always faithful, and that he will keep his promise and his covenant, and will be true to all those who trust in him. But suppose I have watched his ways for forty years, and have found him to be the same yesterday, and to-day, then I conclude that he is immutable—the same in my age as in my youth, the same in my adversity as in my prosperity. I infer from the fact that God has been good to me, that he will be the same to me all my days. Very well, then; as I am the same person, at least as far as my weakness and my necessity are concerned, I will go to God in the same way. The Lord is the same God in every respect; my need is the same as ever it was; his supplies are the same as ever they were; his will to bless me is still the same; and his promise to bless me is the same, for it stands unrevoked in his blessed Word; therefore I will have the same faith and the same hope in God. Looking back and making sure that the Lord has been my help hitherto, I draw the conclusion that he will be my help to the end of the chapter.

This reasoning is good, since *you have to deal with an unchanging God.* You could not reason in that way in reference to man. No; you say, "I cannot go to my friend Brown for help, for I have been to him already." You do not argue that you may freely go again because you have been already. Far from it. You say, "I have received as much from him as I could reasonably expect; and I must not become a burden to him." Or else it happens that your friend grows weary of you, and answers you coldly, and you feel that you can go no more to him. Earthly friends can be drawn upon so much that their generosity is exhausted, and they feel that you are unreasonable in your requests. If, therefore, you have changeable man to deal with, there will be no logic in your reasoning; but when you think of Jehovah who changeth not, then you may infer great things, and the severest logic will support you. He was my help, he is my help, and therefore he will be my help, even to the end.

This kind of argument is very sure to a man's own self, and he is the person most concerned. We know whom we have believed, and we are persuaded that he will not fail us. We know what we do know; and if we cannot tell it to others, we are none the less sure of it ourselves. The Lord has been our help in very remarkable ways, which put his graciousness beyond a doubt, and so our expectation is large and unquestioning: we look for endless, perfect, prompt, and final deliverance from all evil. There is a force about personal experience which, to the man himself, is irresistible; and the conclusion that comes from it is to him as certain as the existence of God. The hammer of Thor, which would have broken the globe, is not more mighty than the argument of personal experience, before which all difficulties of faith are dashed in pieces.

It is clear that *this is an accumulating argument.* The young man who has known the Lord twelve months, and experienced a great deliverance, is sure that the Lord is to be trusted. But when he has passed twenty, thirty, or forty years of the same experience, his assurance will be doubly sure. To a believer in Christ every day teems with providences and mercies. This tree beareth its fruit every month, and the fruit feeds faith wondrously. Every year is crowned with the lovingkindness of the Lord; and so, in old age, the faithfulness of God is a fact which is no more argued, but enjoyed. When the believer dies he has nothing to do but to die. He is assured by an argument which has grown out of forty years' observation. He knows that God will help him, for he has helped him. I stood by the side of a dear old friend and fellow-helper yesterday. He is in his ninety-second year, and has taken to his bed through weakness. Instead of seeking sympathy or speaking to me in a doleful style, he pleasantly observed, "You see I am higher in the world than when you came last time, for I have left the parlour and come upstairs. Very soon I shall not be higher in the world, but higher *than* the world." He said this with that same twinkle of the eye which I have noticed in him in the days of his strength when he was equally full of grace and wit. There was no fear of death to daunt or damp his spirit. He knew nothing of such a feeling. "Ah!" he said, "Isaiah was right when he described our experience in the passage, 'They that

wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.' He begins flying, then goes to running, and then to walking. But the prophet calls this renewing his strength. It looks like losing strength and speed, does it not? Ah! but (he said) you know flying is not a suitable thing for daily life: it is all very well for young people, but it does not suit every-day life. Running is for another period, but it is not a practical pace for a continuance. Quietly walking with God is a safe, lasting, every-day pace. You can keep on at that as Enoch did, till you walk away with God. I have now got to my walking days," said the grand old man. Then he went on to expound the Scripture by other Scriptures. "John says, 'I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you.' That makes them mount up with eagles' wings above the guilt of sin. To the young men he says, 'I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.' In that case there has been struggling and exertion, like the running without weariness. But when he gets to the fathers, he says, 'I write unto you, fathers,' not concerning a high joy, or a successful struggle, but 'because ye have known him that is from the beginning.' That is a walking, quiet, solid knowledge; and it is the best of all." What a happy talk we had! We were two merry men sitting on the brink of Jordan communing together with happy hearts—he of ninety-two talking to me concerning all the way whereby the Lord had led us both since we knew each other, these thirty-four years and more. Oh, yes, it is a blessed, blessed thing to grow in grace as we grow in years, and to increase our argument for faith as we increase our experience.

That argument will remain unchanged in death. When the earth shall rock, the stars shall fall, and the heavens shall be rolled up by the hand of God like a worn-out vesture; when the great white throne shall be seen and the sentence of the righteous Judge shall be heard, our confidence will be still the same: "Thou hast been my help, and nothing shall separate me from thy love."

III. Lastly, and somewhat briefly, ASSURANCE. Here comes the richest cluster which grows out of our subject. The Psalmist says, "Therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

Here is, first, *contented assurance.* David does not say, "I am in trouble, and I must get out of it somehow; and therefore I must needs sin rather than fall under the hand of the enemy." No, he is quiet and patient. He does not make haste and demand immediate deliverance: he quietly waits the Lord's time, and rests under the all-covering wings. You hear no loud outcries from him, as of one struggling against fate. The children of God, like sheep, are dumb before their shearers. David, grateful for past help, holds himself still, and happily awaits the purpose of the Lord. He manifests no fear, no fret, no hurry, no worry. Neither does he cast his eyes towards man. "*Thou* hast been my help," saith he; and he looks that way. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him." But where is Joab? Where are the three mighties? Where are all the royal body-guard? The enemy is cruel, and thirsting for blood:

does David piteously beseech his watchmen to keep well their ward? No, he is calm and peaceful, and sweetly says, "Thou hast been my help; therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

David exhibited a very *patient assurance*. He likens himself to a young eagle beneath the mighty wings of its mother: "In the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." You thought he would have said, "Thou wilt drive thy mighty talons into my adversaries, and tear them in pieces"; or, "Thou wilt strike them as an eagle destroys its prey." No, he is not eager for the Lord to act: he is biding his time; nay, waiting the Lord's time, quite content to be under his wing. What the great eagle may do he leaves to the future, while he nestles down in perfect quietness. May God give us patience always to possess our souls in him! It is not ours to hasten the divine vengeance, nor to wish for a personal triumph; but it is ours to feel the bliss of safety in nearness to God.

Note, next, that it is *the assurance of faith*. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore"—what? "In the light of thy countenance will I rejoice"? No: he had then but little light; he was "in the shadow." The wilderness cut him off from beholding God in the sanctuary. If you cannot see the face of God, his shadow may give you peace. Lord, I will pray to thee to lift up the light of thy countenance upon me; but if thou dost continue to hide thyself, I will still trust thee, and be sure that thou art the same God of grace. Knowing that thy shadow is full of defence for me, I will rejoice therein.

Notice also, it is *continued assurance*. We read not, in the shadow of thy wings *have* I rejoiced, but, "I *will* rejoice." He is rejoicing, and means to go on rejoicing. His joy no man taketh from him. He will rejoice so long as he has a God to rejoice in.

The best of all is, this *is rejoicing assurance*. The text does not say, "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I *trust*," but, "in the shadow of thy wings *will I rejoice*." That is going further than silent submission, or humble trust. David is in the dark; but, like the nightingale, he sings in it. When the Lord seems to hide himself, the soul remembers what the Lord was, and resolves to be glad in him as he was seen aforetime. David lamented for Absalom, but he rejoiced in God. He rejoiced that the wings of the Lord safely preserved him; and though they cast a shadow over him, he would rejoice in the shadow as the evidence that the wings were really there. O child of God, rejoice in the Lord in the dark. There is no honour to you in rejoicing when everything goes well with you; but your faith wins credit if it leads you to rejoice in God when everything runs counter to your comfort. I may be speaking to some dear brother who, in his business, finds things going very cross, and the current of his affairs sets strongly in the wrong direction. Now is the time to show the difference between the joy of the spiritual life and that which merely comes of the natural life. Rejoice in God, and prove that your joy flows from the upper springs "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

In conclusion, let me remark, it is little wonder that so many do not understand trusting in God, for they have never tried it; and answers to prayer, and fulfilment of divine promises, seem to them as idle tales.

If we were to tell them what God has done for us, they would not believe us. There is William Huntington's "Bank of Faith"—well, I would not endorse every word of it; but I see no reason why it should not be accepted as a truthful narrative. When anybody calls it a "Bank of Nonsense," as I have heard them do, I have answered, "It is because you do not know any better. Many other believers could write books equally marvellous." Still, unbelievers will be sure to mock, for it is out of their line altogether. Years ago, a Red Indian went down to Washington, and when he returned to his tribe he began telling them the wonders he had seen among the pale faces. At last he told them that he saw a canoe fastened to a great ball rise up into the sky. One of his brother Indians shot him dead with his rifle, and leaping into the middle of the ring declared that such a liar was not fit to live another minute, and, therefore, he had killed him. The statement was quite true, but as it was outside of Indian knowledge the man was shot. So the experience of a Christian is so far removed from the worldling's line of things, that he ridicules it. It is true for all that. Thousands of us can bear testimony to the truth of the gospel, and we wish, above all things, that you would try it yourself.

When you hear that those who trust in the Lord are delivered, I wonder some of you do not want to know our Saviour. Yesterday a poor person called on a brother minister, and asked for a ticket to go to the gentleman who was curing rheumatism. My friend knew nothing about the gentleman. "Oh," she said, "he is at Croydon, and he has been curing people who have been ill for years." The preacher knew nothing of any tickets, but the person said that her father had failed to see the gentleman, and he would try again. Just so; from every quarter people will come where there is hope of being healed. How strange that men will seek help for their bodies, and not for their souls. There is one who can help in every case of soul-sickness, why not go to him? We have been healed. Why do you doubt? He will be a faithful helper to all those who put their trust in him. Why do you not seek him? We are honest people who bear witness of his helping us: why do you not believe us, so far as to try the Lord Jesus for yourselves? If you will not believe us, believe in God's own Book, and say, "I will look to Jesus for help." Oh, that you would trust the precious Jesus and his precious promises, and his precious blood, by that precious faith whose very trials are more precious than gold! Then shall you find every help you need between this spot and glory's gate. The Lord bring you to Jesus at once for his name's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxiii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—916, 34 (Ver. I.), 734.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

JEHOVAH'S VALUATION OF HIS PEOPLE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 5TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee."—Isaiah xliii. 3.

IN this chapter the Lord comforts his people. By his divine foresight he perceives that there are great and varied trials a little way ahead, and therefore he prepares them for the ordeal. They are to go through rushing waters and flaming fires; and he kindly bids them not to be afraid. How often in God's Word do we read those tender, gracious words, "Fear not"! Should not the trembling ones listen to the voice of their God, and obey it when he saith to them, "Fear not"? It is not right for you who fear God to fear anything else. Once brought to know the Lord, what can harm you? Abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, what danger need you dread? Nay, rather, be of good comfort, and press forward with peaceful confidence, though floods and flames await you.

To encourage his people to rise superior to their fears, the gracious God goes on to issue matchless promises: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." Present good—"I will be with thee"; absent danger—"they shall not overflow thee." God stays his people's hearts by his own promises. In proportion to their faith those promises must lift them up. If you do not believe the promise, you shall not be established by it; but if, with childlike confidence, you accept every word of God as true, then his word shall be to you the joy of your heart, and the delight of your spirit, and you shall be a stranger to fear.

The Lord proceeds, after giving those promises, to set before them what he himself is, and what he has done for them, and what they are to him. He is speaking, of course, to Israel; and he says of Israel, his chosen nation, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." What cause for fear now remains? All believers are of the true Israel. Abraham was the father of the faithful. The faithful, or the believing, are therefore Abraham's seed according to the promise.

The seed was not after the flesh, else would the children of Ishmael have been the heirs of the covenant; but the true seed was born according to promise, and in the power of God; for Isaac was born when his parents were old, by faith in the power of God. Isaac was not the child of the flesh, but he was born according to promise; so that we who are not born of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, by his Spirit, and according to the divine promise, are the true children of Abraham. We are the spiritual Israel. Though after the flesh Abraham be ignorant of us, and Sarah acknowledge us not, yet are we the true seed of him who was the father of believers. The literal Israel was the type of those chosen and favoured ones who by faith are born again according to promise. To these heirs according to promise the Lord saith, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." I am sure I shall not be straining the passage if I now apply it wholly to the chosen of God; and if any of you feel staggered at my use of that term, I would remind you that the chosen of God are made known by their believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is the sure evidence of election. If, therefore, you are a believer in Christ, you are of the true Israel. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God"; and being born of God, you are of the family of his love, you are heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ. If you are not believers in him, what can I preach to you that can comfort you? The unbelieving, living and dying such, have no portion in the covenant of grace. If ye believe not, ye must perish; the promise is given to obedient faith only: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." If this day you become believers, you have, in that faith, the token and mark of the divine choice, and you assuredly belong to the Israel of God. Every heavenly blessing which God promises to Israel belongs to you who are in Christ Jesus, and so are in union with the promised seed.

Coming to our text, I shall ask you, first, to *hearken to the Lord's declaration of his own name:* "I am Jehovah thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." When you have carefully listened to that solemn name, and learned something from it, then I will ask you to *note the Lord's estimate of his people.* What does he think of them? What price does he set upon them? "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." When we have wondered a while at this, we shall briefly *consider the outcome of this very wonderful statement of God's value of his people.* They are precious in his sight, and he loves them, and therefore he will withhold no good thing from them.

I. First, I pray you, HEARKEN TO THE LORD'S DECLARATION OF HIS OWN NAME. May the Holy Spirit open our ears to hear to profit! He says, "I am Jehovah thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." He gives his name thus at large to distinguish himself from the false gods. Other things there were, which men called gods, and these had names; though, indeed, they had no being, but were the creatures of man's imagination and fear. God, the living God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, sets forth his own name and title, that there may be no mistake as to who he is. "I am the Lord," saith he, "and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise

to graven images." He also sets forth his name at large, for the comfort of his people. Is it not written, "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee"? There is something in every name of God which may breed faith in our souls. Whether we know him as Jehovah, Elohim, Shaddai, or Lord, or by whatsoever other name he has been pleased to manifest himself, that title becomes the ground of our confidence, and is the means of fostering faith in his people's minds, when they come to understand its meaning. To a trembling people the Lord enlarges on his wonderful names. I think he also does it to excite our wonder and our gratitude. He that loves us so much is Jehovah: he that can create and destroy; he that is the self-existent God; he, even he, has set his heart upon his people, and loves them and counts them precious in his sight. It is a marvellous thing. The more one thinks of it, the more shall he be overwhelmed with astonishment, that he who is everything should love us who are less than nothing. It is the Holy One who has deigned to choose, and to love unholy men, and to look upon them in grace, and save them from their sins. That you may bow low in loving gratitude, God lets you see who he is. That you may see how great a stoop of condescension he has made, when he loves his unworthy people, and takes them into union with himself, you are made to see how great and glorious is the divine name.

Let us devoutly think of each of these names separately. First, the Lord speaks of himself as "*Jehovah, thy God.*" I need not tell you that where you see LORD in capitals, it should be Jehovah.

Jehovah: "the God of the whole earth shall he be called." His kingdom ruleth over all: there is universality. But he calls himself "Thy God": there is speciality. The goodness of God surrounds all the creatures he has made; but there is a love which is peculiar to his own. To all the nations of the earth he was the one only Lord and God; but yet he said of Israel, "You only have I known, of all the families of the earth." Limit not the benevolence of God; but, at the same time, do not deny the speciality of his love to his people. Wide is the circumference of mercy, but the chosen dwell in the innermost centre of his love. Thus, the one ever glorious Jehovah, while he is God unto the ends of the earth, is Israel's God in a sense in which he is not the God of Assyria, or Persia, or Egypt, or Ethiopia; he has made himself over to his own chosen people, saying, "I will be their God."

Jehovah, the glorious I AM, signifies self-existence. He borrows nothing from others; indeed, in a sense, there are no others apart from him, since all live by his permit and power. He is as complete without his creatures as with them. When there were no heavens, no earth, no twinkling star, nor flying seraph, he was as truly God, and as complete within himself, as he is now that he has made creatures innumerable. Yet, though he be thus all-sufficient, self-sufficient, and self-existent, still he deigns to link himself with our nothingness, and call himself "Jehovah, thy God." The Self-existent gives his people existence, and then exists that he may bless them, and magnify the glory of his own existence in them. The Lord liveth, and we live in him, and by him. In Jesus we hear God saying to us, "Because I

live, ye shall live also." Oh, blessed union to God in Christ Jesus, by which we are supplied with every good from the self-existent fountain of life and being.

Jehovah, again, is a name which means immutability. "I AM THAT I AM," was his name to Moses. God always is in the present. To him there is no past or future.

> "He fills his own eternal NOW,
> And sees our ages pass."

This unchanging One here declares himself to be the God of beings who are but of yesterday, and full of change. Yes, great Lord, thou wast my God when first my pulse began to beat; thou didst care for me when I lay upon my mother's lap. Thou hast watched over me when, in youthful days, I foolishly wandered; thou hast called me back, and taught me to lay my finger in the print of my Saviour's wounds, and say, "My Lord, and my God." Yes, Jehovah has been our God—"The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He never changes nor ceases as to his love to us. He cannot love us more; he will not love us less. Without "variableness or shadow of turning" is Jehovah in his relation to those whom he has called into his favour.

Furthermore, Jehovah means sovereignty. "Jehovah reigneth, let the people tremble." His is a name of lofty royalty; for "Jehovah is a great God, and a great King above all gods." He exercises the absolute prerogative, and "doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." He giveth no account of his matters. As the potter he disposeth of the clay at his own pleasure. Yet, stooping from his boundless sovereignty and freedom, our Lord binds himself to his own people by bonds of covenant pledge and promise, and says, "I am Jehovah, thy God." He is our God, ready to hear our prayers, prompt to help our needs, held by his own oath and promise to be the guardian and helper of his people. I do not know how to admire enough these words of title, so glorious and so gracious; so high above us, and yet so near to us—"JEHOVAH, thy God!" Here is matter of thought, and motive for love.

Now comes a second combination of titles—"*The Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.*" It may not have struck you before; but what a New Testament combination this is—"The Holy One, thy Saviour"! It reminds us of the words—"Just, and the justifier of him that believeth." Here we have one so holy as to be separate from sinners and yet the Saviour of sinners. "Holy, Holy, Holy," is the ascription which is justly due to him; and yet he passes by iniquity, transgression, and sin. "The Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour," it is a commingling of attributes which only the cross can explain. Herein is a world of comfort. God's holiness appears to look dark and black upon a sinner; but when he believes in Jesus this attribute of holiness smiles upon him. Is God holy? Then he will never break his promise. If he declares men to be justified through faith in Christ, then depend upon it, they are justified; he will not run back from the compact of his grace. Having exacted at the hand of our great Surety that which vindicates his justice, he makes that justice the guarantee

that he will no more be wroth with his people. There is a substantial truth in those lines of our hymn :—

> "Payment God cannot twice demand,
> First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
> And then again at mine."

We can now appeal to the holiness of God, and expect that having accepted a sacrifice on our behalf, he will graciously pass by our sin. His holiness forbids that he should declare the death of his Only-Begotten to be a failure, by punishing those for whom Jesus was an accepted sacrifice. The Lord hath made to meet on his beloved Son the iniquity of us all; how, then, shall it be laid at our door? "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree"; and to what end did he bear them, if we also shall endure their penalty? If by faith the substitution of Christ is made ours—and God declares that it is so—then how shall we be condemned who have accepted his sacrifice? Am I not clear if I have died in Christ, and am raised in him to newness of life? The very holiness of God makes us rejoice; for it is enlisted on our side, and assures us of salvation. Delightful title! "The Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour."

No doctrine has more often filled my mind with adoration than this—that God is as holy in the pardon of sin as he is in the punishment of it: that if he had sent the whole race of guilty men to hell, he would not have been more just than he is now in the pardon of those who by faith are in Christ Jesus, and who in him were made to die unto sin. "The Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." The holiness of grace makes salvation ten thousand times more precious than if it had been an arbitrary act of the divine sovereignty. Had it been possible for God to set aside the claims of his justice, and simply to forgive without making satisfaction to his law, we should have felt our standing to be questionable. Unjustly saved! Poor position for one who has a conscience! But instead of that, the Lord is supremely just, and not even that he may be gracious will he abdicate the judgment-throne. His justice shines out as clear and bright as the fair light of his mercy. When I behold the Son of God at Calvary, what do I see? Which is most conspicious at the cross, justice or grace? Truly, I see grace in the gift of Jesus; but I see as plainly justice that made Jehovah bruise his Son, and put him to grief. It is a blessing to feel that our salvation rests upon the rock of divine holiness, quite as surely as upon the basis of divine love. Treasure up those names, "The Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour."

Since "The Holy One of Israel" is our Saviour, we are confident that he will save us from all sin. He has saved us from the penalty and the defilement of sin, he will also save us from the disease of sin, that is to say, our tendency to evil. "They shall call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." The Lord will save believers from all inclination to evil. We shall be saved not only from sins committed, but from indwelling sin, from original sin, from the corrupt tendencies of our nature. "The Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour," will save us until we become holy as God is holy; or, as our Lord Jesus worded it, "Perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is

perfect." My brethren, aspire to this salvation! Let this blessed name of God, "the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour," encourage you to believe that you shall yet be without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Into heaven there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth, and you shall be pure as God himself.

> "O glorious hour! O blest abode!
> I shall be near and like my God;
> And flesh and sin no more control
> The sacred pleasures of my soul."

I beg you to reflect upon the fact, that the glorious Lord, who here styles himself, "Jehovah, thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour," the Creator of all things, and their Preserver, is come very near to you. In the next verse he saith, "Since thou wast precious in my sight thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." Mark, "I have loved thee." It is not enough that he thinks kindly, and deals tenderly; but he loves! He loves! This is an exceeding marvel.

You know, dear fathers, what it is to love your children: you know, dear women, what it is to love your husbands: these loves are faint shadows of the love of God to his chosen. Sweet is the love which unites us to each other; but it is wonderful that God himself should say, "I have loved thee." It makes my heart beat quick to think that I am the object of Jehovah's love.

Remember also that this Holy Lord is working upon you still, that you may reflect his glory. He says in the seventh verse, "I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him." He has begun our new creation, he is carrying it on, and he is completing it. There is a new character forming in believers by God's own hand: a character which will be the image of the Lord Jesus. We are the handiwork of God, his higher creation, the product of his eternal power; nay, more, it is written, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." We are begotten again unto a lively hope, and the life will never die, neither will the hope be frustrate; for the Lord hath fixed his strong resolves to perfect his work in us. What says he in the thirteenth verse? "There is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" Jehovah is fashioning us in the image of his Son, and who shall hinder him? Who shall stand in God's way? If I am a believer, despite depravities of nature, temptations from the world, and assaults from Satan, I must be, I shall be, perfectly transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus, and in me shall the promise of verse twenty-one be absolutely fulfilled: "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise."

II. Secondly, LET US NOTE THE LORD'S ESTIMATE OF HIS PEOPLE. Whatever *we* may think of the Israel of God, the Lord thinks more of it than words can express. He says, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." Let us turn that over in our minds. When the Lord chose a nation to be the depository of his sacred oracles, he might have selected Egypt, if he had willed to do so. Egypt was in

the known world the oldest nation, it was hoary with antiquity. Egypt contained the wisest and most civilized people of early times. Its very ruins are the wonder of the ages. Its records show an extraordinary progress in literature, architecture, and the arts and sciences. Egypt was also the most powerful of empires in the olden times. Before the banners of Assyria, and Babylon, and Medo-Persia came to the front, the dragon of Egypt was a mighty ensign. Yet the Lord did not choose the sons of Ham, but passed by Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba. The Lord chose the seed of Abraham, and the family of Jacob: he multiplied them, and instructed them, and made them to be his own peculiar people. In this sense he could say, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee."

In the course of history the claims of various countries came into collision with those of Israel, and Egypt proudly oppressed Israel. What did God do? Did he hesitate as to which of the two peoples should be preserved? No; the Lord brought out Israel, and turned his artillery upon Egypt. That his people might be free, he hurled plagues upon Pharaoh, until at last he smote all the first-born of Egypt, the chief of all their strength. In this way he gave Egypt for the ransom of his people. He brought Israel forth; and when the proud Egyptian pursued them and overtook them by the Red Sea, the Lord destroyed the chariot and the horse, the army and the power, and again gave Egypt as the ransom of his elect nation. In the days of king Asa, the Ethiopians came up against Judah to the number of a million of men; but "they were destroyed before the Lord, and before his host": thus was Ethiopia given for Israel. Nebuchadnezzar came up against the land and smote Egypt sorely, as it was foretold by Ezekiel the prophet. "Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it: therefore thus saith the Lord God; behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labour wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord God." Then was the crocodile broken by the river, and its power was never restored. Probably the full meaning of the text must be found in the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses, the son of Cyrus. It was written of Cyrus, "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts." Accordingly, Cyrus did cause the people to return to their land, and then the Lord promised him Egypt as his reward. See Isaiah xlv. 14: "Thus saith the Lord, the labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God." Cambyses conquered Egypt, and destroyed many of

its cities, and never since has there been a native prince sitting upon the throne of Pharaoh. God gave to the king of Persia Egypt and the neighbouring regions as the ransom price of his people.

Thus the Lord did of old on the behalf of his literal Israel; and what does this fact say to us? It means this—God's chosen are immeasurably precious in his sight. He chose them to be his people before all worlds out of mere love; and in this ancient love he will abide world without end. Long ere we were born we were thought of by the Lord: our names were in his book, and our persons lay on his heart, from before the foundations of the world. "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." He ordained the chosen ones to be what they were not in themselves. They were not holy, but he ordained them that they should be holy; he chose them that he might make them like to his dear Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. These chosen men are the centre of God's plan and design. If I understand God's great project, it was on this wise: he had formed matter into a thousand marvellous shapes, and he had then created vegetable life in infinite variety and beauty. To this he had added animal life in its differing degrees of intelligence; and then he made angels, who are pure spirit. These several creations he would link together, blending matter and mind, the animal and the spiritual; therefore he resolved that he would make a being that should be nearer to him than the angels, and yet should be akin to the rest of the universe, down even to the mere materialism of which its body should be composed. His Son was in his thought! Immanuel, God-with-man. He resolved that the eternal Son should be incarnate, should be the Adam of a chosen race, "the firstborn among many brethren"; and that these brethren should be his Son's joy, and crown, and delight for ever. The Word made flesh was to be the model and pattern for a generation of beloved ones, who should be "a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." These favoured beings would be of earth, and yet of heaven; brothers to the worm, and yet partakers of the divine nature; lifted up into alliance with the Godhead through Jesus Christ, their representative, who is both God and man. This wonderful conception I can but dimly set before you. Man was so surely to be made in the image of God that he should never again lose that image. The chosen were to be placed beyond further danger of falling, because they would know sin, and hate it intensely, because of their experience of it and salvation from it. By his gracious redemption, the Lord purposed to produce beings that would be for ever loyal to their Great King, not through force, but through their new nature, and the constraint of love to him who redeemed them from evil. Perhaps it would not have been possible, by a mere fiat, to have created free agents who would be safe in the surpassing elevation of sons of God. Before they could be able to stand nearest to the eternal throne, related to the eternal God, they must be knit to Jesus by eternal bonds of love. They must be so bound by grateful love that there shall be no possibility of their imitating Satan in proud rebellion. By the operations of his grace, the Lord has prepared a creature who is able humbly to enjoy the favour of heaven, and safely to

occupy a rank to which angels cannot aspire. A creature, however wisely made, might become self-sufficient and disobedient; but a creature that has fallen, that has been condemned, and then has been redeemed by God himself assuming its nature; redeemed by blood, lifted up by a supernatural work of the Holy Ghost into newness of life, and so made akin to God—that creature, I say, is thus prepared to live near the eternal throne, and to bear the dignity of a child of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ.

God's intent was to produce a race that should be honourable in his sight, and well-beloved of his soul. That being his eternal purpose, he firmly fixed his soul upon the accomplishment of it. He would glorify himself in these people. "This people have I formed for myself: they shall shew forth my praise." Did not the world show forth his praise? Yes, in a measure, the spacious earth and swelling flood proclaim the wise and powerful God; but he meant to make men far clearer mirrors of his glory. In them he would be seen through all the ages. Their lives should show forth his longsuffering, his grace, his love, his wisdom, his holiness, and his whole character. In redeeming them with his own blood, he would set forth in them his justice and his grace. These were to be repetitions of the image of the Only-Begotten, in whom God is well pleased. God so loved his Son, that he would see his beauties reflected in others: he, the Son of God, should stand surrounded with brethren who would rejoice to honour him. It was a God-like idea! God determined that, in saving men, he would show forth all the glory of his nature.

This design would be costly, even to Jehovah himself. To carry out this purpose, men, having fallen, must be redeemed by blood. The Lord gave Ethiopia and Seba for his people; but this was little. Would he give his only-begotten Son? The ever-blessed Son of the Father was more precious than Egypt multiplied beyond all count; and Ethiopia and Seba were as nothing to his value. Would the Lord give his own Son? Yes, to carry out his divine resolve of magnifying himself in the salvation of guilty men, he spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all. O miracle of miracles! Love beyond degree!

But even then men could not be saved unless the Holy Ghost, another blessed person of the divine three, should condescend to come and live in their bodies. It was great for Jesus to come and live in human flesh for thirty years; but for the Holy Ghost to abide in our human nature for thousands of years is an equal marvel. Yes, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost is true. This further miracle of love has been perfected in us in whom the Spirit abides. This is far more than giving Egypt for our ransom. God gives himself to save unworthy man.

And now, beloved, shall he not with the Lord Jesus also give us all things? Is anything now too dear for God to make a sacrifice of it? Is there anything in heaven or earth, or even within the sphere of imagination, that God would not give for the accomplishment of purposes of grace to his people? Believers, do you know how great you are? Do you know, O men and women saved by grace, what you

are, and where you are? If you did, I think you would begin to shout "Hallelujah!" and would never come to an end. You are blood-redeemed, and bought by your Lord with a price. You are the jewels of Jesus' crown, the gems within his breastplate. You are moulded by his hand to be likenesses of himself. You are set over the works of God's hand; and made princes of the blood royal of the universe. Do you know what it means to be called sons of God? Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God! You are joint-heirs with Christ, do you comprehend that? The Lord Jesus hath made us kings and priests unto our God, and we shall reign for ever and ever. Oh, the splendours, the infinite splendours of the love of God to his believing people!

Henceforth, everything shall be sacrificed for us. God will give all that he has to save his beloved ones. He will make the whole of nature and providence subservient to the complete salvation of his chosen. Kings shall be born and buried; empires shall rise and fall; republics and systems shall come and go; and all shall be the scaffold for the building of the house of God, which is his church. All events shall work for the good of the chosen. It is God's grandest, highest purpose to gather together in one the whole company of his redeemed in Christ Jesus their Lord, and to make them like their Head. O beloved, I know not how to preach! I want to sit, and in silent wonder offer to the Lord the praise of my heart. Glorify God, I pray you; for he has glorified *you*.

III. And now we shall close with a brief meditation. LET US CONSIDER THE OUTCOME OF THIS.

If it be so, that the glorious God has really and of a truth loved us, his people, and valued us at a mighty price, then see *how secure his people are!* I will not say anything upon this head, but the Lord himself shall speak. "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." He has given so much for us that he will not now lose us. He values us too highly to let his enemy carry us away. Beloved, see how secure they must be who are priceless in the esteem of God!

Note, next, *the honour which God puts upon them.* It follows upon the text, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable." God has put us poor sinners among his honourables. I know one who, in her unconverted state, had fallen into sad sin, and the remembrance thereof was painful; but the Lord removed the shame by laying home to her soul these gracious words, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable." Oh, yes! the woman who was a sinner, who washed our Saviour's feet with tears, and wiped them with her hair, was honourable to her Lord. The thief on the cross, gibbeted though he was, was honourable before him who is the

fountain of honour. He was a peer of the realm, and went in with Jesus into the palace; for his Lord said, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Our ascending Lord entered paradise with this thief as his attendant. The Lord has a way of transforming dishonourables into honourables. He lifts us from the dunghill, and sets us among princes, even the princes of his people. His own dear word saith to us, "Since thou wast precious in my sight thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee; therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life."

Again, from the high estimate which the Lord puts upon his people we conclude *the certainty of the Lord's gathering together all his people.* This is set forth from the fifth to the seventh verses, "I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather them from the west"; and so forth. This encourages me to preach with all my might; for the Lord has a people whom he must and will gather to himself. He bids the nations act as his servants in this matter. "I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth." Why, they may be up to their necks in the bogs of sin. But they are to be brought home, for the Lord will not lose his sons and daughters. Perhaps they have wandered far into grievous vices; but if they are called by his name, every one of them must come. Yes, it is written, "even every one." Our almighty Saviour can draw a sinner back from the shelving brink of hell. While there is life there is hope. God will bring back his redeemed, into whatever iniquity they may have fallen. Victorious grace shall set free the captives of sin. As to free-will, the Lord will make his people willing in the day of his power. On the cross, according to Psalm xxii., our Lord said, "A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come." "Shall come" shall make them come, and the Lord Jesus shall not shed his blood in vain. The Lord gave Egypt for Israel's ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for her, and he will not lose what he has purchased at such a price. Whether the exile hath been carried west, or east, or north, or south, the Lord will devise means that he be not left to perish in the far-off land. When I come to preach in this great house, I say within my heart, "Lord, thou hast much people in this city. I will seek for them. This people thou hast bought for thyself, at an exceeding great price, and I would find them for thee." A controversialist once said, "If I thought God had a chosen people, I should not preach." That is the very reason why I do preach. What would make him inactive is the mainspring of my earnestness. If the Lord had not a people to be saved, I should have little to cheer me in my ministry. Other sheep he has, whom he must bring in, and my hope is that he will bring some of them in by me. Beloved, God has a people everywhere, and we are sent to draw them to him with the powerful magnet of the cross. This finds them out amid the ashes, even as Jesus said: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." We preach Christ crucified, and "to him shall the gathering of the people be." The Lord calls to himself his own sheep, and these follow him and are saved.

Here is another little bit for meditation. If God has determined to

glorify himself by us and in us, *let us be in one accord with him.* Already I have quoted the twenty-first verse: "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise." Beloved, let us labour to show forth his praise, for he has formed us for that purpose. Oh, that we could live wholly to his glory! Not only let us speak sometimes to his praise, but let us always be making known the exceeding riches of his grace. Do you not feel, beloved, that if God has chosen you for such an end as this, your whole being cries, "I must and will show forth his praise. My soul doth magnify the Lord"? If we knew how much God loved us, we should love him much more in return, and we should give much more to his cause and to his poor than we do. Just now I have need of large help in money for home-work at the Tabernacle; and this need would not arise if we were all consecrated as we ought to be. As it has arisen, we shall soon meet the need if we all use our substance for the Lord. It is not my work any more than it is yours; but I have the care of it, and I would be glad to be helped. We are stewards, and not owners; and the least hint should set us enquiring as to what is needed in our Master's house. We should not need exhorting, much less to be begged of: we should be always crying to the Lord, "Show me what thou wouldst have me to do." He is Jehovah our God, the Holy One of Israel, who hath redeemed us at a measureless price, and the very least we can do is by holy loving, cheerful working, patient suffering, and spontaneous giving, to show what we think of our Lord. Ah! if we live near to God, we shall not long for the silly amusements which are beguiling the base-born professors of this evil age. Think of a joint-heir with Christ at the theatre! The very thought of consorting with the world is degradation! We are born of a nobler birth, and lifted to a higher level than to grovel in childish, brutish play. If we are the sons of Jehovah, our joy, our hope, our recreation, our object in life, will all be among high and eternal things. Our affections are set upon things above, not on things on the earth. Try to live up to your destiny, ye heirs of God. May God the Holy Ghost help you!

What love we ought to bear to God! Does God give up Egypt for us, and shall not we give up the riches of Egypt for him? Shall we go down to Egypt for help when God has already given up Egypt that he might help us? If we could have all the wealth of Ethiopia and Seba, what would it be in comparison with our Lord? Wherefore, let us love him supremely, and count all things but loss for the excellency of his knowledge. Beloved, we must love him: we do love him. How can it be otherwise? "The love of Christ constraineth us." Madame Guion wrote of "torrents." Divine love, if truly felt, is a torrent, sweeping all before it, like that ancient river Kishon. Oh, for those torrents now!

May God the Holy Ghost bless these feeble words of mine to all his people, and may many long to be joined with his people by faith in Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah xliii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—192, 730, 733.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE TEST OF TASTE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 12TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."—1 Peter ii. 3.

I THINK there can be very little doubt that Peter is here quoting from Psalm xxxiv. 8: "O taste and see that the Lord is good." As I read you the chapter just now, I could not help observing the constant traces of Old Testament language. It endears Peter to us when we see how he prizes the ancient Word of the Lord; and, at the same time, it puts honour upon the Old Testament itself, when we see the Holy Spirit in the New thus quoting from the Old.

It is noteworthy that in Psalm xxxiv. 8 the Lord God is spoken of. The passage actually runs—"O taste and see that Jehovah is good"; and Peter does not hesitate for a moment to apply the passage to the Lord Jesus. The word "Lord" is here used in its utmost fulness of meaning, as the equivalent for Jehovah, and it is applied to our Saviour Jesus Christ. That Peter is here speaking of Jesus we are sure from the context: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." The chosen foundation-stone is, beyond question, the Lord Jesus; and Peter uses words concerning him which were written by inspiration concerning Jehovah himself. Evidently, to Peter the Lord Jesus was Lord and God. He remembered the voice which he heard in the holy mount, when he was an eye-witness of his majesty: "For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Let us continually pay divine honour to our Lord Jesus Christ. If he be not God, our faith is vain, and our hope is gone; but his Deity is no cunningly-devised fable. His own works, as well as the Holy Scriptures, attest his Godhead: the whole church of Christ believes in him as very God of very God, and on this rock we build our everlasting confidence.

Peter had special knowledge of his Lord; for you remember that, on one occasion, he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon

Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew xvi. 16, 17). The Father had manifested the Lord unto him as his only-begotten Son. We little wonder that he speaks of tasting that THE LORD is gracious; for by revelation he was made to know and understand to a very high degree the glory and majesty of the incarnate Son of God. That he should speak of his graciousness is also very natural; for he had himself tasted of his grace. This same Peter had denied his Master with oaths and cursings; and when, after his Lord was risen, he sent a message to him by Magdalene, then he tasted that the Lord is gracious. Afterwards, when the Lord met him by the sea, and put the question to him three times, "Lovest thou me?" and betokened the perfect reconciliation there was between him and his once false disciple, by giving him the charge to feed his sheep and lambs, Peter knew that he was wholly pardoned, and completely restored; and then he "tasted that the Lord is gracious." When he was made so useful at Pentecost, was made to work miracles, was released by an angel from prison, and on many other occasions, Peter tasted "that the Lord is gracious." It was Peter who used those explicit words concerning the substitutionary sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree": for right well had he beheld the Lord Jesus as full of grace and truth, and in his own personal experience he had tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Taking these words out of the mouth of Peter, I shall ask you, my brethren and sisters, Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? No doubt is meant to be insinuated by Peter's use of the "if," for he believed that those to whom he wrote had feasted upon the love of the Lord Jesus. Assuredly I would suggest no doubt concerning my brethren by the use of the same words; yet I would put you upon a search, to make assurance doubly sure. Dear friends, have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? Is this fact past conjecture? Can you say positively, "We know in our own hearts the grace of our Lord Jesus"?

To help you to a happy conclusion, I purpose to handle my text in the following manner. First, here is *a royal dainty:* "The Lord is gracious." Here is, secondly, *a special sense,* namely, taste: "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." Then, thirdly, we shall ask *a searching question:* Have we tasted that the Lord is gracious? Oh, for grace to answer truthfully! In the last place, we shall consider *a series of practical inferences.* If so be we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, then such and such things follow thereupon. Throughout the whole discourse may the Spirit of the Lord rest upon us!

I. First, then, here is A ROYAL DAINTY: "The Lord is gracious." Jesus is full of grace. Jesus flavours the mouth with grace when we feed upon him. In him is grace which can be tasted by us while here below. Once tasted, this grace is remembered.

Let me remind you that *the Lord is gracious in his person, nature, and character.* He would never have been Immanuel, God with us, if he had not been gracious. What brought him from above to take upon him our frail humanity? What held him here while he endured "such contradiction of sinners against himself"? What but his natural and

innate graciousness as "the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"? What did he here that was not gracious? Was he not always feeding the hungry, healing the sick, teaching the ignorant, comforting the mourners, or raising the dead? If you read his life —take which you will of the four evangelists—you cannot help feeling that you have beheld the face of one who was altogether love, goodness, graciousness. "He went about doing good." From his lips poured gracious words, and from his hands streamed gracious deeds. Our precious Christ is gracious both as God and man; gracious in his tone and manner and spirit; gracious in every office; gracious to all sorts and conditions of men; gracious in the promise of his coming, and gracious in delaying it, that by his longsuffering men may be saved. The Lord is good; blessed are all they that put their trust in him. We know that our Lord Jesus is gracious by nature.

But, beloved, we have found him exceeding *gracious in the manner of dispensing his salvation*. He is most free, spontaneous, and generous in his gifts of grace. He needs not to be prompted or persuaded in order to make him gracious. We do not drag grace from him as from an unwilling giver, but he delights to bestow his mercy; for the Lord is essentially gracious. Remember his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." When we were his enemies, he reconciled us to God by his blood; and when we had neither thought nor wish to come to him *for* salvation, he came to us *with* salvation. Many of us are living trophies of his conquering grace—grace unsought, and utterly undeserved. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Though we now love the Lord our God, we cheerfully confess that "we love him because he first loved us." When we lay polluted in our blood, cast out, and ready to perish, it was with him a time of love; and he passed by and said to us, "Live," and we did live through his eternal word of life. He began to deal with us when we had no dealings with him. Remember his coming to the grave's mouth when we lay wrapped in the grave-clothes of trespasses and sins, and were, like Lazarus, even beginning to stink. He came, and by his mighty voice he called us forth, and we arose to newness of life. Gracious, indeed, is he who, in the freeness and sovereignty of his grace, is found of them that sought him not, and is made manifest unto them that asked not after him.

Beloved, as we know he is gracious by nature and gracious in manner, so is he *gracious in his gifts*. How gracious was he when he gave himself for us! This was a gift unspeakable. What priceless boons follow therefrom! He gave us pardon and life. He took us from beneath the gibbet, and lifted us up to justification and acceptance. God-condemned and self-condemned, we stood shivering between the jaws of doom, and then did Jesus come and speak our pardon, perfect, clear, and irreversible, sealed with his own blood, and spoken by his own word. He gave us his pierced hand in token that we were accepted in the Beloved. Beloved, you know all about this; but I

would stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. The Lord is gracious in blotting out our sin. Once we had not obtained mercy, but now we have obtained mercy. Because he is gracious he has put us among the children by the gift of adoption, and has made provision for us as members of his family. We are clothed with his everlasting righteousness; nourished upon the bread of heaven; led, and taught, and trained by his wisdom, and preserved, sanctified, and prepared for the mansions of glory by the power of his Holy Spirit. Oh, the gifts that he bestows upon worthless good-for-nothings like ourselves! Where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound. Oh, the wonders of love! Truly the Lord is gracious!

Since we have come to know our Lord, how gracious have we found him to be! "*He giveth more grace.*" No word can express all that Jesus has been to us; but this word "gracious" goes some way towards it. We have had many inward struggles and conflicts, and much we have needed grace; but as our need such has been our supply. It has sometimes gone hard with us, my brethren, while pressing on to God; but whenever we have been ready to slip with our feet, the Lord has held us up, for his mercy endureth for ever. Ay, and when we have stumbled, he has set us on our feet again, for he is always gracious. When he might have chidden us sharply, ay, and might have laid on the rod, yet has he sweetly smiled and reminded us of his great love, and restored us by his graciousness. We have been full of faults, but he has removed them all; for he is gracious. We have been full of wounds, but he has healed them by his own stripes. We have been full of wanderings, but he has brought us again to his fold. Even now, sitting in this house, some of us feel ourselves to be the most unworthy creatures out of hell; and yet we know that Jesus is ours, and we are his. We cannot but cry out, "Depths of mercy!" We are the chief of sinners, and yet in the matter of obtaining grace we are not behind any of his saints. We are both vile and precious—black as the tents of Kedar, and fair as the curtains of Solomon. Oh, the wonders of free grace, in its continuance and perseverance! Truly, "the Lord is gracious."

The Lord is gracious, for he hears prayer. Our course is set with memorials of the Lord's answering our pleadings. That bedside of ours is a witness that the Lord is good. That old arm-chair, where you are wont to kneel, could tell strange stories of what you have sought and found. Everything has gone cross with you in business, but you have bowed the knee and found grace to help in time of need. You cried unto the Lord when the child was sick, and you were comforted. You sought the Lord when the dear one was dead in the house, and you found the living God to be your consolation as you went to the open grave. When your wounds were bleeding through bereavement they were stanched in answer to prayer. When your soul's windows were darkened, grace was the sun which came shining into your gloom. You have knelt before the Lord at times when you have been weighed down with a heaviness which you could not explain, and none could remove; but you have not knelt in vain. Dark night seemed settling down upon your spirit, and neither moon nor star appeared; but even then

"Prayer made the darkened cloud withdraw,
Prayer climbed the ladder Jacob saw."

You came forth from the closet rejoicing, for the Lord was gracious to you, and had put off your sackcloth, and girded you with gladness. Now you can sing—

"In all my trials here below,
I'll humbly kiss his rod,
For this, through grace, I surely know,
He's still my gracious God."

I hardly need remind you of these things, because they must be ever present with your soul. The Lord has been gracious, very gracious to you. Beloved, some of you have been *favoured with choice times,* "as the days of heaven upon the earth." You have climbed the mount and been alone with God; and there you have seen your Lord and heard his voice in your soul. Oh, the rapture of intimate fellowship with God! Those to whom the Lord is gracious often enjoy an experience which they would not dare to tell, lest they should seem too familiar. If we were forced to tell our joys, we should have to use expressions like those of Rutherford, or say, rather, those of Solomon's Song, which alone can express the high, mysterious joys of those who lean their heads upon the bosom of their Lord.

"When in my heart his heavenly love
He sweetly sheds abroad,
How joyfully he makes me prove
He is my gracious God!"

Possibly your experience has been of a sadder kind: you have backslidden, and *he has restored you in his grace.* You grew cold; you took less delight in the things of God; you began to absent yourself from the house of prayer; your Bible grew dusty, and your closet was forsaken; you were almost carried away captive by the world. Though you had tasted of the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come, you had almost fallen away; and if you had altogether done so, you know how it is written, "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." But Jesus held you back from that fatal step; for the Lord is gracious. Your eyes were opened, your heart was broken, you were laid low in the dust of self-abasement, and you began to cry unto the Lord—"Return, O Holy Dove, return." The Holy Spirit did return, and he brought you back to Christ, and to peace and holiness. Then you sang sweetly, "He restoreth my soul." In that day the Lord was seen to be a gracious God. Your face was black because the sun of this vain world had looked upon you; and yet the Lord saw comeliness in you, and still kept you in his heart. Though you had broken the holy vows which bound you to himself, yet he would not cast you away, but still declared that he had espoused you unto himself in faithfulness, and that therefore you should know the Lord. Oh, the graciousness of our Lord to his erring ones! How kind is he to those who fall!

But you do not know, and I do not know, to the full how gracious the Lord is. Remember that *he is preparing us for a glory inconceivable.*

Everything is working out his perfect design. Here in this world we look upon the wrong side of the fabric that is being woven in the loom of providence. When we ascend to heaven we shall see the true pattern to which Christ is working by all his dealings with us, and then we shall perceive that he was carrying out a plan of grace by which we were made meet for glory. Beloved, the Lord is preparing us for perfection of holiness and bliss. He is working us into the image of his Son, and we shall be like him when we shall see him as he is. He is making us fit to dwell among the angels of light, and eternally to drink of the rivers of God's pleasure. We are being educated by all the processes of his providence and of his grace to dwell in that celestial land where the Lamb is the light, and the Lord God is the delight of his people.

"The Lord is gracious"—gracious to the uttermost. There is enough for a sermon in this one sentence. It is a great dish to taste of—"that the Lord is gracious." Before we go to the next point, I hope you have begun to enjoy the fragrant savour of your Redeemer's name, and the exquisite flavour of his Word. Blessed be the name of Jesus, he is gracious! Grace is poured into his lips. His hands drop the sweet-smelling myrrh of grace, and perfume all they touch.

II. But now let us think of A SPECIAL SENSE which is exercised in tasting that the Lord is gracious. Faith is the soul's eye by which it sees the Lord. Faith is the soul's ear by which we hear what God the Lord will speak. Faith is the spiritual hand which touches and grasps the things not seen as yet. Faith is the spiritual nostril which perceives the precious perfume of our Lord's garments, which smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. Faith also is the soul's taste by which we perceive the sweetness of our Lord, and enjoy it for ourselves.

Taste is an inward sense, a private, powerful, personal appreciation. To taste is to know a thing in the essence, outcome, and enjoyment of it. To taste is to exercise discernment, to make discovery, and to gain assured knowledge of a thing. Apply this to the fact that the Lord is gracious, and what a weighty matter it is to taste thereof!

In answering the question, what is meant by taste? I would bid you notice the likeness of the word "taste" to another, namely, "test." *Taste is a test* as to things to be eaten. We prove and try an article of food by tasting it. He that goes to the market to buy cheese, draws out a piece and eats it, that he may judge of the bulk by the taste. So it is with anything the value of which depends upon the flavour; it has to be tasted that it may be tested; and taste is the best test. If you desire to know the graciousness of God, you must taste and see, by accepting his grace and all its blessed influences. No test is superior to this. Experience teaches as nothing else can. The empiric moves in danger, speculating at every step; but the man of experience walks on solid ground. Even so, we do not speculate upon the grace of God, but "we have known and believed the love which God has toward us."

In order to spiritual taste, there must be *apprehension*. We must know and believe that the Lord is gracious. If I do not know the fact, and believe that it is so, I cannot begin to taste it. We must have some idea of what being gracious means, and some conviction

that this is truly the character of our Lord Jesus. The clearer the knowledge, the more distinct the taste may become. Some of you have come as far as that: you know and believe that the Lord is gracious, though you fear that he may not be gracious to you. This is the first step; but it is evident that more is needed.

After apprehension must come *appropriation*. Martin Luther saith: "And this I call tasting, when I do with my very heart believe that Christ hath given himself unto me, and that I have my full interest in him, that he beareth and answereth for all my sins, transgressions, and harms, and that his life is my life. When this persuasion is thoroughly settled in my heart, it yieldeth wonderful and incredible good taste." In order to taste, we must make a very close appropriation. We place the gift of God, not in our pocket, but in our mouth, when we taste it. That is the closest appropriation, when we taste a blessing. O my hearers, I fear that many of you have heard of our gracious Lord for years, and yet have never tasted that he is gracious. You believe that he is so, but you have never personally tried him for yourselves. See, there is honey! Jonathan saw the wood to be flowing with it; for it dropped from many a bough! But this was not enough: he tasted, and his eyes were enlightened. "O taste and see that the Lord is good." Take to yourselves the blessings of his grace. Appropriate Christ, I pray you. Let each one take him to himself, and then you will know what tasting means.

But taste further means *appreciation*. You may have a thing within yourself, and yet not taste it; even as Samson's lion had honey within its carcase, but he was a dead lion, and so could not taste it. A man may get the gospel into his mind, but never taste it. It wants a living man, and a living appropriation, and a living appreciation, or else the royal dainty is not tasted. Have you ever enjoyed the truth that the Lord is gracious? "Oh," say you, "not as I should like to do." You have well spoken; but I only asked about a taste, I did not enquire about feasting to the full. "To be filled with all the fulness of God" is our inheritance; but just now it will suffice if we so taste as to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Just now we are talking about tasting: and a taste of grace, though it bring us but little joy, is a great thing as an evidence of more to follow. Have you tasted enough of your Lord to know that he is incomparably gracious? Have you taken enough of the Lord to yourself to be assured that there is none like him? Have you found all fulness dwelling in him? There is no grace like the grace which comes from a dying Christ, a risen Christ, a reigning Christ, a coming Christ. Jesus is all in all to all who are in him.

III. So, having considered the spiritual sense which tasteth heavenly meat, I now come to press upon you A SEARCHING QUESTION: "If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

Dear friends, *this is a very simple elementary question*. It is not, "If so be ye have preached that he is gracious." Many of you will never preach, nor even write for others. Nor does it say, "If so be ye have laid it all down doctrinally in theological form." No, no: some of you will never be theologians; but that is not the matter in hand. Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? I may not know what a

dish is made of; but I may have tasted it, for all that. I may be grossly ignorant of the mysteries of cookery, but I can tell whether a dish is sweet to my taste. Our self-enquiry is about a primary matter, in which even new-born babes in grace are concerned. I put it to everyone here, whether babes or strong men—Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious?

However simple is the question, *it goes to the root of the matter;* it takes in the whole case of a man's soul. Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? Do you know Christ by personal reception of him? If not, you are in an evil case. If you only know the Lord Jesus in the book; if you only know him by the ear through the preacher; what do you know to purpose? You are sick, and there is the medicine; you can interpret the doctor's Latin, and so you ascertain every drug in the mixture. Will this heal you? No; you must taste the medicine, you must receive it into your inward parts, or you will derive no benefit from it. Suppose you are hungry, and before you is spread a meal. There is the *menu*, and you read it through. Yes, you approve of every course. Will this satisfy you? No; you must sit down and handle that knife and fork and get to work, or you will remain hungry. I do not need to press you: you are a willing guest at the table. But when I set forth the truth that the Lord is gracious, many of you are content to hear about it, and do not proceed to make the test and taste that the Lord is good. Oh, that you would come to the feast! Oh, that you would eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness!

Every man here must answer that question for himself. I hear a good wife say, "I hope my husband has tasted that the Lord is gracious." My good friend, go on hoping; but your husband must know the grace of God for himself, or your hopes will be vain. A father here says, "I hope my daughter has tasted that the Lord is gracious." I am pleased that you have such a hope for her; but your daughter must taste for herself. We cannot in this matter be sponsors for one another. Tasting is an operation which must be performed by the individual palate. There is no other method of practising it. No man can say that he has tasted my food for me; and none may dream that they have tasted Christ because their friends have feasted on him. We must know the Lord for ourselves, or die in ignorance of him.

I am afraid this question *will have to be answered in the negative* by many hearers; for they have never tasted Christ. This is an extraordinary thing with some of you, for you are very sound in the faith, religious in your conduct, and moral in your lives. You would not be content with any preaching which was not the unadulterated milk of the Word, for your mind would reject the concoctions of heresy; and yet, though you know the truth, you have not tasted this particular and all-important fact, that the Lord is gracious. What is the good of knowing that food is good if you leave it untasted? It must be a wearisome business to sit at a table, and have the dishes all brought before you, and then taken away again. It must be tantalizing to have a sniff of the food, but never to have a morsel in your mouth. Many hearers remain in that wretched state. The river of God is at

their feet, and yet they are dying of thirst. The banquet of grace is spread at their door, and yet they perish with hunger. Alas! the mass of mankind have never tasted, do not know what it means to taste, and do not care to know. Ah me! this is woe upon woe.

Those who rejoice that they have tasted that the Lord is gracious, yet confess it with a deep blush, because *they have only tasted.* Still there is a great deal in the tasting, for he that can taste will desire more. I would to God that all of us would go to Jesus, and feed upon him to the full. Oh, for a divine hunger which would make us eat abundantly! I would be ravenous for Christ. Would God we thirsted after him, as the hart panteth after the water brooks, for then we should soon be filled! I fear the most of us must confess that we have only tasted that the Lord is gracious, whereas we might have been sitting in his banqueting-house, having our souls satisfied with the rich provisions of his house.

Yet, blessed be the Lord, *we have tasted.* We have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To us this taste has come through the Word. Have you not often cried, when you have gone out of this house, "Blessed be God for what we have heard to-day"? So, too, in reading the Scriptures, we have felt that the Lord is gracious. When we have enjoyed assurance of our salvation we have tasted that the Lord is gracious. In answered prayer, in providential supplies, in gracious renewals, we have tasted that the Lord is gracious. In our work or suffering, in our joys or sorrows, in our meditations or praises, we have tasted that the Lord is gracious. There is no getting this truth out of our soul's creed: we are sure of it. If a man has tasted a thing, he knows the flavour of it, and is not to be argued out of his knowledge. I have eaten sugar, and I find it sweet. Here comes a philosopher, and declares that it is sour. Go on, philosopher, and philosophize as long and as much as you like; but my palate defies your philosophy. When last I took quinine I held very dogmatic views as to its bitterness. Men who have tasted are inclined to be positive. But, cries one, "It must be wrong to be dogmatic." I care nothing about hard words: I will be dogmatic about what I positively know. When a man is sure of things, why should he pretend to be undecided? There are some matters about which I am past argument, past the power to doubt; and the graciousness of my God is one of these things. This I have seen, and handled, and tasted; from henceforth let no man trouble me—the die is cast.

Let me tell you when we have tasted the graciousness of the Lord. We have done so *after great bitterness.* Our Lord, as George Herbert would say, has put his hand into the bitter box, and given us a dose of wormwood and gall. We have drunk the cup in submission, and afterwards he has made us taste that the Lord is gracious, and then all bitterness has clean gone, and our mouth has been as sweet as though wormwood had never entered it. It is wonderful how the delectable grace that is in Christ Jesus drowns the offences of life, and makes us say, "Surely the bitterness of death is passed."

When a man is ill, he often loses his taste. The most delicious food is nauseous to him. "His soul abhorreth all manner of meat." But such is the flavour of the truth that the Lord is gracious, that it is more

pleasant to us when we are sick than at any other time. The love of Christ is a delicious refreshment for a sufferer. When our pains multiply and our spirits are depressed, then is a gracious Christ more precious to us than in the day of health and joy. We get fresh sips of sweetness, and new tastes of delight when our tribulations abound.

The taste of grace is always on some men's palates, their mouths are filled all the day with the praises of the Lord. These are happy beings: let us be of their number.

When a man grows old he sometimes loses his power of taste. Barzillai at fourscore years said to David, "Can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink?" Age had dulled his palate. But the natural law is not law in the spiritual world; for the older we get the more do we relish the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Believers grow more heavenly as they get nearer to heaven; or at least, they should do so. As earth goes, Christ comes. Christ is very choice to us when we are young, but when we are grey-headed he is sweetness itself. We realize our Lord more than ever, and we have a keener perception of the grace which he has manifested towards us. Shortly we shall be with him where he is, and shall behold and share his glory: then will he be surpassingly delightful to our perfected taste. Again I put the question—Do you know anything about it? I fear that some of you are quite at sea as to what I mean. You know the taste of fine old port, or sparkling champagne; you know the delicacies of the season: but you have never tasted that the Lord is gracious, and you smile as you hear the question; for it seems to you too absurd. Why, you have no taste which could apprehend such things, and, indeed, you have no spiritual life. Dead men cannot taste the food of the living. So men who are spiritually dead cannot taste spiritual delights. The Lord quicken you! May you this morning find Christ, who is the resurrection and the life! The moment you live unto him you will begin to crave the milk of the Word, and soon you will have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

IV. So we come to our last point, which is A SERIES OF PRACTICAL INFERENCES.

I have seen by the glances of many of you that you feel you have been made to sit at the table of salvation. You have not partaken so fully as you hope to do; but yet you have, at least, tasted that the Lord is gracious. Well, then, as the text puts it, "*Desire the sincere milk of the word.*" If you have tasted it, long for more of it. Do not hanker after the dilutions and concoctions of "modern thought," which you will find vended in many a pulpit. Beware of dangerous foods, compounded of speculations and heresies. If you have ever tasted the true milk of the word, you will not desire any other; for there is none like it. When the other foods come into the market, say to yourself, "The best is good enough for me, and Christ Jesus is the best of the best. The Lord is so gracious that none can compare with him for a moment, and therefore I shall not leave him." Let others fly to poisoned cups of error, or intoxicating draughts of superstition, we will keep to that which is so grateful to our taste, so nourishing to our souls.

Next, *expect to grow, and pray that you may do so.* You, dear friends,

have tasted that the Lord is gracious; and now you desire to be nourished up in sound doctrine, that your whole nature may be developed. How do Christians grow? If they grow aright, they grow all over. Some grow in knowledge, but they do not grow in virtue: this is as if a child's head should get bigger and bigger, and the rest of his body should remain as it was: he will become a hideous creature, or will die of water on the brain. Some say they will make their hearts grow, and never mind their heads. This also will not do. If your heads remain pimples while your hands and feet increase, you will be deformed. We must grow up into Christ in all things. How? Why, by drinking in the unadulterated milk of the Word. To feed thereon makes us grow. Why are some stunted? Because they do not take enough spiritual food, or else because it is not the true word of God which they hear. It is sad that there should be so much evil teaching: it is the pest of our age. One of the most active agencies in London for the spread of certain diseases is milk; and though persons take in their milk carelessly, and think it is an innocent fluid, there may often be death in the can, and the pint of milk may be a pint of poison. The gospel is the most sustaining food for the soul; but if it is adulterated, it may convey spiritual disease and death into the soul. More mischief can be done by the pulpit than by all other agencies put together. Brethren, pray for ministers; for if they preach the gospel and water, so that the gospel loses its power; or if they preach gospel and poison, so that it ceases to be pure truth, then the people cannot grow, nor even live. Brethren, let us pray for more faith, more hope, more love, more zeal, and so let us grow. "Desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow."

Next, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious," *abhor the garlic flavour of the world's vices.* I mean those alluded to in the first verse—"malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies, and all evil speaking." If the Lord is gracious to you, be gracious to others. If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, do not carry about with you the bitterness of malice, or the sourness of envy. Have no savour of cunning about you, nor the least taint of hypocrisy, nor the foul tang of evil speaking. Is not even a smack of evil too much? A man that has tasted that the Lord is gracious ought to have a sweet mind, and a sweet mouth; he should judge charitably, and speak kindly of others. If you do not do so, I advise you to taste again and again that the Lord is gracious, till the powerful flavour of grace shall abide in the mouth, and cast out all the noisome savours of hate.

I want you also, dear friends, if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to *lose taste for all earthly trifles.* Some amusements we are supposed to condemn; but we have not condemned them indiscriminately. We have nothing to say about their suitability for those who can be satisfied with them. Many diversions may be suited to those whose natures can be gratified with them. As to the children of God, we judge for them by quite another rule. Let the ox have its grass and the horse its hay; but souls must feed on spiritual meat. A farmer takes me over his farm. I see that he keeps swine, and I see the men bring out for them barley-meal and wash. The farmer asks me what I think of it. I think it is capital

stuff for those for whom it is prepared. I do not condemn the swine for enjoying it, nor the farmer for providing it for them. But if he asks me whether I will have some of the wash, I am quick at answering, "No, farmer, not I." "Why not?" "Well, I have other tastes. In your own house I have eaten bread and beef, and other foods are not what I hunger for." That is all I say. Those who want vain amusements may judge themselves by their likings; but if so be that we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, our tastes are henceforth spoiled for the world's impure delights. To dispute about taste is acknowledged to be unwise; and when sin and holiness become matters of taste with men, we shall soon see what manner of men they are. The taste of the world will never be our taste. I hope it never will; for if it were, we should have grave cause to fear that we were of the world. If we were of the world, the world would love its own, and we should love the world's own as much as the world loves it. May you lose all taste for the apples of Sodom and the grapes of Gomorrah!

Lastly, if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, *taste again.* For what does the next verse say? "To whom coming, as unto a living stone." You have come to Jesus; keep on coming to Jesus. You tell me that you trust Christ; trust him again, my brother. "He is all my hope." Hope in him yet more. "He is my joy." Rejoice in him still more. "He is my love." Love him with all your souls. If you have tasted and enjoyed, then feast and enjoy. "Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." There is no stint at my Lord's table, and you need not restrain yourself from fear of surfeit or sickness. You can never partake too freely of the grace of Christ Jesus your Lord. No man was ever made ill by feeding too freely upon heavenly things. No, the dainties of heaven create an expansion of soul, and as we receive we gain capacity to receive yet more of holy gifts. We feast on when once we have tasted that the Lord is gracious. The Lord feed you to the full, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Peter i. 17—25; ii. 1—12.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—913, 724, 715.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE MAN WHO SHALL NEVER SEE DEATH.*

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 19TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?"—John viii. 51—53.

IN the previous part of this chapter we hear the Jews, with malicious voices, assailing our blessed Lord with this bitter question, "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" How very quietly the Saviour answered them! He did answer them, because he judged it needful to do so; but he did so with great patience, and with sound argument: "I have not a devil; but I honour my Father." Clear proof this! No man can be said to have a devil who honours God; for the evil spirit from the beginning has been the enemy of all that glorifies the Father. Paul, who had not read this passage—for the Gospel of John was not then written—was nevertheless so filled with his Master's spirit, that he answered after a like manner when Festus said, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." He calmly replied, "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." This was a fine copy of our Saviour's gentle and forcible reply: "I have not a devil; but I honour my Father." Brethren, whenever you are falsely accused, and an evil name is hurled at you, if you must needs reply, "give a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Be not heated and hurried; for if so, you will lose strength, and will be apt to err. Let your Lord be your model.

* This sermon was preached, in great sorrow, after the sudden death of the senior deacon of the Tabernacle church, Mr. WILLIAM OLNEY. He had been more than fifty years a member, and for many years our right-hand man. His zeal in service was only rivalled by his patience in suffering. Love was his prominent characteristic. He was graciously impetuous, and yet persistently constant. While he was a very ready speaker, he was not a mere talker; but was as liberal with his gifts, and as abundant in his prayers, as he was frequent in his exhortations. Never Pastor had abler or more earnest helper. His son right worthily sustains the honour of the house; but scarcely could any dozen workers fill up the gap which the father's death has caused in the departments of prayer-meetings, foreign missions, home evangelization, and orphanage. Help, Lord, for a great man hath fallen in our Israel!—C. H. S.

The false charge was the occasion of our Lord's uttering a great truth. On they rush, furious in their rage, but he flashes in their faces the light of truth. To put down error, lift up truth. Thus their deadly saying was met by a living saying: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." Nothing so baffles the adversaries of the faith as to utter with unshaken confidence the truth of God. The truth which Jesus stated was full of promise; and if they wilfully rejected his promise, it became worse to them than a threatening. Christ's rejected promises curdle into woes. If these men, when he said to them, "If a man keep my saying he shall never see death," yet went on reviling him, then their consciences, when afterwards awakened, would say to them, "He that believeth not shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." If the believer shall never see death, then the unbeliever shall never see life. Thus the gospel itself becomes "a savour of death unto death" to those who refuse it; and the very word which proclaims eternal life threatens eternal death to the wilfully unbelieving. I pray that, this morning, we may be put into a gracious frame of mind, and may be so helped to keep Christ's saying, that we may inherit this wondrous promise: "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death."

May the Holy Spirit specially aid me while I first speak upon *the gracious character:* the man who keeps Christ's saying. Secondly, I would dwell upon *the glorious deliverance:* "He shall never see death." Thirdly, taking the two later verses of my text, I would honour *the great Quickener;* for evidently, according to the Jews, our Lord was making much of himself by what he said; and in truth the fact that the believer shall never see death does greatly magnify the Lord Jesus. May he be glorified in our mourning hearts while we think of our departed friend as one who shall never see death!

I. First, consider THE GRACIOUS CHARACTER: "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death."

Observe, that *the one conspicuous characteristic of the man who shall never behold death is that he keeps Christ's saying or word.* He may have other characteristics, but they are comparatively unimportant in this respect. He may be of a timorous nature; he may often be in distress; but if he keep Christ's saying, he shall never see death. He may have been a great sinner in his early life; but, being converted, and led to keep Christ's saying, he shall never see death. He may be a strong-minded man, who keeps a firm grip of eternal realities, and therefore becomes supremely useful; but none the more for that is this promise true to him: the reason for his safety is the same as in the case of the weak and timorous: he keeps Christ's saying, and therefore he shall never see death. Divest yourselves, therefore, of all enquiries about other matters, and only make inquisition in your own heart upon this one point: do you keep Christ's saying? If you do this, you shall never see death.

Who is this man who keeps Christ's saying? Obviously, *he is a man that has close dealing with Christ.* He hears what he says; he notes what he says; he clings to what he says. We meet with persons nowadays who talk about faith in God; but they know not the Lord

Jesus Christ as the great sacrifice and reconciler. But without a mediator there is no coming to God. Jesus says, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." His witness is true. Brethren, we glorify Christ as himself God. Truly, the unity of the Godhead is never doubted among us; but while "there is one God," there is also "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." For ever remember that Christ Jesus as God-man, Mediator, is essential to all our intercourse with the Father. You cannot trust God, nor love God, nor serve God aright, unless you willingly consent to his appointed way of reconciliation, redemption, justification, and access, which is only through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. In Christ we draw nigh unto God. Attempt not to approach unto Jehovah, who is a consuming fire, except through the incarnate God. Tell me, my hearer, is your faith fixed upon him whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin? Do you come to God in God's own way? for he will not receive you in any other. If you reject the way of salvation through the blood of the Lamb, you cannot be keeping the saying of Christ; for he says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; and he says this of none else.

These people, next, making the Lord Jesus their all in all, reverenced his word, and therefore kept it: they respected, observed, trusted, and obeyed it. By keeping his saying is meant, first, that *they accept his doctrine.* Whatever he has laid down as truth is truth to them. My hearer, is it so with you? With some their great source of belief is their own thought. They judge the divine revelation itself, and claim the right, not only to interpret it, but to correct and expand it. In the fulness of self-confidence, they make themselves the judges of God's Word. They believe a doctrine because the light of the present age confirms it or invents it. Their foundation is in man's own thought. In their opinion, parts of Scripture are exceedingly faulty, and need tinkering with scientific hammers. The light of the Holy Ghost is to them a mere glowworm as compared with the light of the present advanced age. But he that is to share the promise now before us is one who believes the Saviour's word, because it *is* his word. He takes the sayings of Christ, and his inspired apostles, as being therefore true, because so spoken. To him the inspiration of the Holy Ghost is the warrant of faith. A very important matter this: the foundation of our faith is even more important than the superstructure. Unless you ground your faith upon the fact that the Lord hath spoken, your faith lacks that worshipful reverence which God requires. Even if you are correct in your beliefs, you are not correct in your spirit unless your faith is grounded on the authority of God's own Word. We are to be disciples, not critics. We have done with cavilling, for we have come to believing. In this our departed deacon stood on firm ground. By him every teaching of the Word was accepted with a lively, childlike faith; and though tempted by the school of doubt, he was not in the least affected by its reasonings. To him the gospel was dear as life itself. As *he* did, so must we believe Christ's doctrines.

Next, the gracious man *trusts Christ's promises.* This is a crucial point. Without trust in Jesus we have no spiritual life. Say, my

hearer, dost thou rely upon the saying of the Lord Jesus, "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life"? Dost thou believe in the promise of pardon to the man that confesseth and forsaketh his sin—pardon through the precious blood of the great sacrifice? Are the promises of Christ certainties to thee, certainties hall-marked with his sacred "Verily, verily, I say unto you"? Canst thou hang thy soul upon the sure nail of the Lord's saying? Some of us rest our eternal destiny solely upon the truthfulness of Christ. When we take all his promises together, what a fulness of confidence they create in us!

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!"

Furthermore, the gracious man *obeys his precepts*. No man can be said to keep Christ's saying unless he follows it practically in his life. He is not only teacher, but Lord to us. A true keeper of the Word cultivates that spirit of love which is the very essence of Christ's moral teaching. He endeavours to be meek and merciful. He aims at purity of heart, and peaceableness of spirit. He follows after holiness even at the cost of persecution. Whatsoever he finds that his Lord has ordained, he cheerfully performs. He does not kick at the Lord's command, as involving too much self-denial and separation from the world; but he is willing to enter in by the strait gate, and to follow the narrow way, because his Lord commands him. That faith which does not lead to obedience is a dead faith and a false faith. That faith which does not cause us to forsake sin, is no better than the faith of devils, even if it be so good.

"Faith must obey her Father's will,
As well as trust his grace:
A pardoning God is jealous still
For his own holiness."

So, now you see who the man is that keeps Christ's saying. That man receives, through the Word of God, a new and everlasting life; for the Word of God is a "living and incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever." Wherever the seed of the Word drops into a soil which accepts it, it takes root, abides and grows. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It is by Christ's saying, or by Christ's Word, that life is implanted in the soul: by that same word the heavenly life is fed, increased, developed, and at length perfected. The power and energy of the Holy Ghost which work through the word are used as the beginning, the sustaining, and the perfecting of the inner life. The life of grace on earth is the blossom of which the life of glory is the fruit. It is the same life all along, from regeneration to resurrection. The life which comes into the soul of the believer, when he begins to keep Christ's sayings, is the same life which he will enjoy before the eternal throne in the realms of the blessed.

We may know what keeping Christ's saying is from the fact that he himself has set us the example. Note well the fifty-fifth verse, where Jesus says concerning the Father—"Yet ye have not known

him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but *I know him, and keep his saying.*" We are to keep our Lord's saying, even as he kept his Father's saying. He lived upon the Father's word, and therefore refused Satan's temptation to turn stones into bread. His Father's word was in him, so that he always did the things which pleased the Father. When he spoke, he spoke not his own words, but the word of him that sent him. He lived that the divine word might be executed: even on the cross he was careful that the Scripture might be fulfilled. He said, "He that is of God heareth God's words"; and this was so truly the case with him that he said, "Mine ears hast thou opened." The word was everything to him, and he rejoiced over his apostles, because he could say of them, "They have kept thy word." He, whose word you are to keep shows you how to keep it. Live towards him as he lived towards the Father, and then you shall receive the promise he has made: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." If love be the fulfilling of the Lord's saying, our dearly-beloved but now departed friend kept the saying of Christ—for in that matter many believers have done virtuously, but he excelled them all. He has not looked on death.

II. Now we turn to the delightful part of our subject, namely, THE GLORIOUS DELIVERANCE which our Lord here promises: "He shall never see death." Our Lord did not mean that he shall never die, for he died himself; and his followers, in long procession, have descended to the grave. Some brethren are cheered by the belief that they shall live until the Lord comes, and therefore they shall not sleep, but shall only be changed. The hope of our Lord's appearing is a very blessed one, come when he may; but I do not conceive that to be alive at his coming is any great object of desire. Is there any great preference in being changed beyond that of dying? Do we not read that, "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep"? This is a great truth. Throughout eternity, if I die I shall be able to say I had actual fellowship with Christ in the article of death, and in descent into the grave, which those happy saints who will survive can never know. It is no matter of doctrine, but yet, if one might have a choice in the matter, it might be gain to die.

> "The graves of all his saints he bless'd,
> And soften'd every bed:
> Where should the dying members rest,
> But with the dying Head?"

How dear will Christ be to us when, in the ages to come, we shall think of his death, and shall be able to say, "We, too, have died and risen again"! You that are alive and remain will certainly not have a preference over us, who, like our Lord, shall taste of death. I am only speaking now of a matter of no great moment, which, as believers, we may use as a pleasant subject of discourse among ourselves. We grieve not that our brother has fallen asleep before the Lord's glorious appearing, for we are sure that he will be no loser thereby. Our Lord has said, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death"; and

this does not relate to the few who will remain at his second advent, but to the entire company of those who have kept his saying, even though they pass into the grave.

What does this promise mean? It means this, in the first place: *our face is turned away from death.* Here am I, a poor sinner, convinced of sin, and aroused to a fear of wrath. What is there before my face? What am I compelled to gaze upon? The Greek is not fully interpreted by the word "see": it is an intenser word. According to Westcott, the sight here mentioned is that of "a long, steady, exhaustive vision, whereby we become slowly acquainted with the nature of the object to which it is directed." The awakened sinner is made to look at eternal death, which is the threatened punishment of sin. He stands gazing upon the result of sin with terror and dismay. Oh, the wrath to come! The death that never dies! While unforgiven, I cannot help gazing upon it, and foreseeing it as my doom. When the gospel of the Lord Jesus comes to my soul, and I keep his saying by faith, I am turned completely round. My back is upon death, and my face is towards life eternal. Death is removed; life is received; and more life is promised. What do I see within, around, and before me? Why, life, and only life—life in Christ Jesus. "He is our life." In my future course on earth, what do I see? Final falling from grace? By no means; for Jesus saith, "I give unto my sheep eternal life." What do I see far away in the eternities? Unending life. "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life." Now I begin to realize the meaning of that text, "I am the resurrection: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." And again, "I am the life: he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die." The man who has received the saying of the Lord Jesus has passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation, and consequently shall never gaze on death. All that lies before the believer is life, life more abundantly, life to the full, life eternal. What has become of our death? Our Lord endured it. He died for us. "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." In his death as our representative we died. There is no death penalty left for the believer; for not the least charge can be brought against those for whom Christ has died. Hence we sing—

> "Complete atonement thou hast made,
> And to the utmost farthing paid
> Whate'er thy people owed:
> Nor can his wrath on me take place,
> If shelter'd in thy righteousness,
> And sprinkled with thy blood."

Shall *we* die for whom Christ died in the purpose of God? Can our departure out of the world be sent as a punishment, when our Lord Jesus has so vindicated justice that no punishment is required? When I behold my Lord die upon the cross, I see that for me death itself is dead.

Then comes in another sense of the expression. "He that keepeth my saying shall never see death," means that *his spiritual death is gone never to return.* Before the man knows Christ, he abideth in death,

and wherever he looks he sees nothing but death. Poor souls! *you* know what I am talking about, *you* that are now under concern of soul; for you try to pray, and find death in your prayers; you try to believe, but seem dead as to faith. Alas, you ungodly ones! although you know it not, death is everywhere within you. You are "dead in trespasses and sins." Your sins are to you what grave-clothes are to a corpse; they seem your natural investiture; they cling to you, they bind you. Little do you know what corruption is coming upon you, so that God himself will say of you, "Bury the dead out of my sight." As soon as ever the gospel saying of the Lord Jesus comes to a man with power, what is the effect? He is dead no longer: he begins to see life. It may be, that at first it is a painful life—a life of deep regrets for the past, and dark fears for the future; a life of hungering and thirsting; a life of pining and panting; a life that wants a something, it scarcely knows what, but it cannot live without it. This man sees life; and the more he keeps his Saviour's word, the more he rejoices in Christ Jesus, the more he rests on his promise, the more he loves him, the more he serves him, the more will his new life drive death out of sight. Life now abounds and holds sway, and the old death hides away in holes and corners. Though oftentimes the believer has to mourn over the old death which struggles to return, yet he does not gaze upon that death of sin as once he did; he cannot endure it, he takes no pleasure in the contemplation of it, but cries to God for deliverance from it. Grace frees us from the reign of death as well as from the penalty of death; and in neither of these senses shall the keeper of Christ's saying ever look upon death.

"But," cries one, "will not a Christian man die?" I answer, not necessarily; for some will remain at the coming of our Lord, and these will not die; and hence there is no legal necessity that any should die, since the obligation would then rest alike on all. But good men die. The tokens of death are seen in mournful array upon my pulpit. Yet our dear brother did not die as the penalty of his sin. He was forgiven; and it is not according to God's grace or justice to punish those whom he has forgiven. O my hearers, if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, death will be a penal infliction *to you;* but death is changed in its nature in the case of a believer in Jesus. Our death is a falling asleep, not a going to execution. It is a departure out of the world unto the Father, not a being driven away in wrath. We quit the militant host of earth for the triumphant armies of heaven by the gate of death; that which was a cavern leading to blackness and darkness for ever, has, by the resurrection of our Lord, been made into an open tunnel, which serves as a passage into eternal glory. As a penal infliction upon believers, death was abolished by our Lord; and now it has become a stairway from the grace-life below to the glory-life above.

"If a man keep my saying, he shall never gaze on death," may further mean, *he shall not live under the influence of it.* He shall not be perpetually thinking of death and dreading its approach, and that which follows after it. I must admit that some Christians are in bondage through fear of death; but that is because they do not keep their Master's saying as they ought to do. The effect of his saying

upon us is frequently such that instead of being afraid to die, we come to long to depart. In such a case we should realize the verses of Watts, who tells us that could we see the saints above, we should long to join them.

"How we should scorn these robes of flesh,
These fetters and this load!
And long for evening to undress,
That we may rest in God.

"We should almost forsake our clay
Before the summons come,
And pray and wish our souls away
To their eternal home."

I have to check some dear brethren when they say to me, "Let me die the death of the righteous." No, do not talk as Balaam did; but rather say, "Let me live, that I may glorify God and help my sorrowing brethren in the Lord's work." I pray you, do not hasten to be gone; and yet this impatience proves that death has lost its terrors for us. We do not see death looming before us as a coming tempest: we do not gaze upon it as a fascinating horror which makes our faces pale, and casts a lurid glare on all around. We see not the darkness, for we walk in the light: we fear not the rumbling of the chariot, for we know who rides to us therein.

We shall never see that which is the reality and essence of death, namely, the wrath of God in the second death. We have no cause to fear condemnation, for "it is God that justifieth." That final separation from God, which is the real death of human nature, can never come to us. "Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" That ruin and misery which the word "death" describes, when used in relation to the soul, will never befall us; for we shall never perish, neither shall any pluck us out of Christ's hand.

When the believer dies, he does not gaze on death. He walks through the valley of the shadow of death; but he fears no evil, and sees none to fear. A shadow was cast across my road, but I passed through it, and scarcely perceived that it was there. Why was that? Because I had my eye fixed upon a strong light beyond; and I did not notice the shadow which otherwise would have distressed me. Believers are so rejoiced by the presence of their Lord and Master, that they do not observe that they are dying. They rest so sweetly in the embrace of Jesus, that they hear not the voice of wailing. When they pass from one world into another, it is something like going from England to Scotland: it is all one kingdom, and one sun shines in both lands. Often travellers by railway ask, "When do we pass from England into Scotland?" There is no jerk in the movement of the train; no broad boundary: you glide from one into the other, and scarce know where the boundary lies. The eternal life that is in the believer glides along from grace to glory without a break. We grow steadily on from the blade to the ear, and from the ear to the full corn; but no black belt divides the stages of growth from one another. We shall know when we arrive; but the passage may be so rapid that we shall not see it. From earth to heaven may

seem the greatest of journeys, but it is ended in the twinkling of an eye.

"One gentle sigh, the fetter breaks,
We scarce can say, 'He's gone,'
Before the ransomed spirit takes
Its mansion near the throne."

He shall never gaze on death: he shall pass it by with no more than a glance. He shall go through Jordan as though it were dry land, and scarce know that he has passed a river at all. Like Peter, the departing shall scarce be sure that they have passed through the iron gate, which shall open of its own accord; they shall only know that they are free. Of each one of them it may be said, as of Peter, "He wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision." Fear not death; for Jesus says, "He that keepeth my saying shall never see death."

Follow the soul when it enters upon the other world: the body is left behind, and the man is a disembodied spirit; but he does not see death. All the life he needs he has within his soul by being one with Jesus. Meanwhile, he is expecting that at the trump of the resurrection his body will be reunited with his soul, having been made to be the dwelling and the instrument of his perfected spirit. While he is absent from the body, he is so present with the Lord that he does not look on death.

But the judgment-day has come, the great white throne is set, the multitudes appear before the Judge? What about the keeper of Christ's saying? Is he not afraid? It is the day of days, the day of wrath! He knows that he shall never see death, and therefore he is in no confusion. For him there is no "Depart, ye cursed." He can never come under the eternal sentence. See! hell opens wide her mouth tremendous. The pit which of old was digged for the wicked yawns and receives them. Down sink the ungodly multitude, a very cataract of souls. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." In that terrific hour, will not his foot slip? No; he shall stand in the judgment, and shall never see death.

But the world is in a blaze; all things are being dissolved, and the elements are melting with fervent heat; the stars are falling like the leaves of autumn, and the sun is black as sackcloth of hair. Is he not now alarmed? Ah, no! He shall never see death. His eyes are fixed on life, and he himself is full of it. He abides in life, he spends that life in praising God. He shall never gaze on death; for Jesus says, "Because I live, ye shall live also." O blessed eyes, that shall never look on death! O happy mind, that has been made confident in Jesus Christ of an immortality for which there is no hazard! Our dear brother was the embodiment of life in the service of the Lord. Last Sabbath he sat in this seat behind me, and responded in his very soul to the Word of the Lord. Last Monday was spent all day in the service of God and this church, in the most hearty manner. Though a great sufferer, his spirit carried him over his bodily weakness, and he constantly exhibited an amazing zeal for God and the souls of men. To the last the old ruling passion was strong in him: he would speak for his Lord. He was so struck down that he did not know that he was

dying. He found himself in heaven or ever he was aware, and I dare say he said to himself, "I thought I was going to the Tabernacle; but here I am in the temple of my God. For many a year I took my seat among my brethren below, or went about serving my Lord among his people, and now I have a mansion above, and behold his face; but I will now see what there is to do." Yes, he will serve God day and night in his temple, just as he did here; for he was never tired of work for Jesus. He was always at it, and always full of life. He never beheld death while he was with us, for he overflowed with life; and when physical death came, he did not gaze upon it, but simply bowed his head, and found himself before the throne.

What a glorious word is this! Alas for you who are ungodly! you are made to look on death. It haunts you now; what will it be in the hour of your decease? "What will you do in the swelling of Jordan?" Nothing remains for you but the wages of sin, which is death. The ruin and misery of your souls will be your endless portion. You will be shut in with the finally destroyed, ruined, and wretched ones for ever! This is a dreadful looking for of judgment. It ought to startle you. But as for the believer, surely the bitterness of death is past. We have nothing more to do with death as a penalty or a terror, any more than we have to do with spiritual death as the choke-damp of the heart, and the mother of corruption.

III. This brings me to the third point—THE GREAT QUICKENER. Those Jews—what a passion they were in! How unscrupulous their talk! They could not even quote Christ's words correctly. They said, "Thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never *taste* of death." He did not say so. He said, "Shall never *see* death." We may be said to taste of death as our Master did; for it is written that "He tasted death for every man." And yet in another sense we shall never taste the wormwood and gall of death, for to us it is "swallowed up in victory." Its drop of gall is lost in the bowl of victory. However, the Lord Jesus did not say that we shall never taste of death; neither did he mean that we shall not die, in the common sense of the word. He was using, to the Jews, words in that religious sense in which their own prophets used them. The ancient Scriptures so used the word death; and these Jews knew their meaning right well. Death did not always mean the separation of the soul from the body; for the Lord's declaration to Adam was, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Assuredly, Adam and Eve died in the sense intended; but they were not annihilated, nor were their souls separated from their bodies; for they still remained to labour on earth. "The soul that sinneth it shall die," relates to a death which consists of degradation, misery, inability, ruin. Death does not mean annihilation, but something very different. Overthrow and ruin are the death of a soul, just as perfection and joy are its life for ever. The separation of the soul from God is the death penalty; and that is death indeed. The Jews refused to understand our Lord; yet they clearly saw that what Jesus claimed tended to glorify him above Abraham and the prophets. Hidden away in their abusive words, we find a sense which is instructive. It is not the greatness or the goodness of a believer that secures his eternal life; *it is his being linked*

by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is greater than Abraham and the prophets. The man keeps Christ's saying, and that becomes a bond between him and Christ, and he is one with Christ. Because of their Lord, the saints live; and the living of the saints by him brings to him glory and honour. His life is seen in every one of his people: like mirrors, they reflect his divine life. He has life in himself, and that life he imparts to his chosen. As the old creation displays the glory of the Father, so the new creation reveals the glory of the Son. Believers find their highest life in Christ Jesus their Lord, and every particle of it glorifies him.

It is also to our Lord's glory that we live by his word. He does not sustain us by the machinery of providence, but by his word. As the world stood out into being because God spake, so do we live and continue to live because of Christ's saying. That which he taught, being received into our hearts, becomes the origin and the nourishment of our eternal life. It is greatly glorifying to Christ that, by his word, all spiritual life in the countless myriads of believers is begotten and sustained.

It is clear that the Lord Jesus is far greater than Abraham and all the prophets. Their word could not make men live, nor even live themselves. But the saying of Jesus makes all live who receive it. By keeping it they live—yea, live for ever. Glory be to the name of him who quickeneth whom he wills!

A sweet inference flows from all this, and with that I conclude. *The glory of Christ depends upon the not seeing of death by all who keep his saying.* If you and I keep his saying, and we see death, then Jesus is not true. If you, believing in Jesus, gaze on death, it will be proved that either he had not the power or the will to make his promise good. If the Lord fails in any one case, he has lost the honour of his faithfulness. O ye trembling, anxious souls, lay hold on this:

> "His honour is engaged to save
> The meanest of his sheep."

If the saint of God, who has won thousands for Jesus, should after all perish, what a failure of covenant engagements there would be! But that failure would be just as great if one of the least of all those who keep our Lord's word should be suffered to perish. Such a loss of honour to our all-glorious Lord is not to be imagined; and hence if one of you who are the least in your father's house do really trust in him, though encumbered with infirmities and imperfections, he must keep you from beholding death. His truth, his power, his immutability, his love, are all involved in his faithfulness to his promise to each believer. I want you to take this home with you, and be comforted.

Ay, and if I have some foul transgressor here this morning, the grossest sinner that ever lived, if thou wilt come to Christ, lay hold upon his gracious saying, keep it, and be obedient to it, thou shalt never see death. There is not a soul in hell that can ever say, "I have kept Christ's saying, and I have seen death, for here I am." There never will be one such, or Christ's glory would be tarnished throughout eternity. Keep his saying, and he will keep you from seeing death!

How eagerly did my departed friend long for the conversion of those who came to the Tabernacle! He was never satisfied while any were unblessed. He had great longings. He loved revivals and missions. Tidings of souls saved stirred his inmost soul. Oh, that his prayers, while he was with us, may be answered now that he is gone from us! He not only lived among us, but he lived in our hearts. He needs no praise from me; his praise is in all the church. He will require no monument; all your hearts are his memorials. Never can I forget my beloved fellow-worker either in time or in eternity. Beloved, the real William Olney has not seen death, although with many tears we must lay him in the grave next Wednesday. Pray much for me: my loss is not to be measured. Pray much for his dear family, whose loss cannot be repaired. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Revelation vii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—875, 877, 872.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE BLESSING OF THE HIGH PRIEST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 26TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them."—Numbers vi. 22—27.

THE Lord has blessed his people, and he would have them know it. He has blessed them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and it is his wish that they should experience the fulness of this blessedness. Are any of the Lord's people without a sense of his blessing? It is not the will of God that you should continue in this low condition. If you are cast down, he has said to his prophets, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." Have you sinned, and wandered into the darkness? The Lord bids you return, and encourages you to pray, "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." The happy God would have you happy in the enjoyment of his blessing.

To bring this blessing constantly to the remembrance of his chosen, the Lord appointed a representative of himself who should publicly pronounce his blessing upon the people. He chose Aaron, and he bade Moses instruct him. Aaron was not only to offer sacrifice, and to make intercession, but he was to take a higher stand, and bestow blessings, in the name of God, upon the assembled people. Those who are old may fitly pronounce a blessing upon their children, as Jacob did upon his twelve sons; and the minister of Christ may, in God's name, pronounce a benediction upon the people. This was the custom in early times: the congregation was dismissed with the gracious words: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." Our God has appointed One above all others to bless his people, even our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the antitype of Aaron and his sons; and in the exercise of his high office continually blesses his people. He began his ministry with the Sermon on the Mount, and the word "Blessed." His whole life was a stream of blessing; for "he went

about doing good." When he rose to heaven, having completed his ministry, it was as "he lifted up his hands, and blessed them." He "shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven," bringing blessings with him, even gifts for men. In the name of the triune God, the Lord Jesus, from the highest glory, effectually blesses us to-day. Let not your hearts be troubled, as though you were beneath the storm-cloud of the curse. Know ye not that the curse is altogether turned away from us; for he was "made a curse for us"? The blessing alone remains, and Jesus himself remains to repeat it.

Remember, with solemn awe and heart-searching, that this blessing was for the children of Israel, and for them only. Aaron was not appointed to bless the nations who were without God; but to bless the children of Israel. The great blessing which our Lord Jesus Christ pronounces is for his people, even for those to whom he gives eternal life. Ask yourselves whether you are believers, as Jacob was? Are you pleaders with God, as Jacob was? It was through his triumphant wrestling with God that he won the princely name of Israel: have you ever prevailed in prayer? If so, though you may feel very feeble, and halt as you come from the scene of conflict, yet to you, even to you, as being spiritually of the seed of Israel, the Lord Christ, the "high priest of our profession," has given the blessing. But if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ there is no blessing for him, since that awful text thunders at him: "Let him be Anathema Maranatha"—accursed at his coming. The Lord grant that such a curse may lie on none of us; but may we, as we hear the priestly benediction, be able by faith to receive it as our own!

In handling my text, I shall first dwell for a few minutes upon *the general character of this benediction*. Much is to be gathered here. Secondly, we shall review *the blessing itself*, weighing its three clauses, and gathering instruction from each word. Thirdly, we will hearken to *the divine amen*, which is at the close of it: "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." May the Holy Spirit aid us in this meditation!

I. First, then, consider THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF THIS BLESSING. It was a blessing, in the first place, *given through a priest*. Not every man might take upon himself to bless the people: it was Aaron—God's high priest, who offered sacrifice for the people—who was called to bless the tribes. The hands which had been stained with the blood of the victim, were outstretched in blessing. Once in the year the Lord's high priest went in unto God for the people, not without blood; and when his solemn duties within the veil had been duly done, he came forth, and put on those glorious garments which for a while he had laid aside, and he blessed the people, as he was authorized to do. From which I gather that we can get no blessing from God, except through the priesthood of Christ. There must be the sacrifice, and the sprinkling of the blood, before the music of the blessing can sound in our ears. God bestows all spiritual blessings upon us in and through the Lord Jesus, who died for us, and is ordained to be the one mediator between God and man. Christ as the great high priest, who offered himself without spot unto God, is the divine channel of blessing. Do we know the Lord's Anointed? Are we resting in the sacrifice which

he has presented, even his own blood? Without Christ no blessing can come to us. O my hearers, do not remain without the precious blood, if that be your present condition; but may the good Spirit of God lead you to hear the voice of love, which cries, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"! Jesus saith, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." You cannot know the Father as a God of infinite blessedness except through the Son, who is the priest with the one effectual sacrifice. It is a priestly benediction, sealed with sacrificial blood; and it can only be bestowed by the hand of our glorious Priest.

Next, *this benediction is of the nature of intercession.* There lies within these words a prayer. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee" is the cry of the man of God to Jehovah, that he would bless and keep his people. The priest's office was to make intercession for the people, and we have in our Lord Jesus a high priest who pleads evermore for his chosen. We have a high priest, through whom all that come to God will be accepted, "seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Never forget that "he made intercession for the transgressors." He has, moreover, a special pleading for believers. Concerning them there is a peculiar exercise of intercession; for he says, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." The high priest had a peculiar office in reference to the seed of Israel, and our Lord makes special intercession for his saints. He is exercising that office now. How much we owe to his intercession no tongue can tell. Try to learn a little of it from these words, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." "I have prayed for thee": here is our safety. Believe, my brethren, that our Lord has prayed for us, is praying for us still. With his quick eye of love he has perceived our danger long before we have dreamed of it; and with his eloquent tongue of earnestness he has pleaded the causes of our soul at the throne of grace, before we were aware of our peril. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him"; and even so your heavenly High Priest perceives what you have need of, and asks for it long before you think of presenting such a petition. Blessed be the name of him who is the Advocate with the Father on our behalf!

"He ever lives to intercede
Before his Father's face:
Give him, my soul, thy cause to plead,
Nor doubt the Father's grace."

But, next, *this benediction is yet of a higher order than intercession.* Every man in the camp might have prayed—The Lord bless and keep his people, and lift up his countenance upon them. But no man in all the camp would have dared to say, in the same authoritative style as Aaron did: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Here is not only faith pleading, but faith receiving and bestowing. "Without doubt," says Paul, "the less is blessed of the greater"; and thus Aaron was

greater than the people, being set apart to a high and honourable office, into which none else might intrude. He was God's representative, and so he spoke with the authority of his office. To-day our Saviour's intercession in the heavenly places rises far higher in power and glory than that of any ordinary intercessor. He blesses in fact, while the greatest saints on earth and in heaven can only bless in desire.

"With cries and tears he offer'd up
His humble suit below;
But with authority he asks,
Enthroned in glory now."

This benediction wears the form of a fiat as well as of a prayer. The priest here speaks the blessing for which he asks. Turning to the Father, our Lord Jesus cries, "Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me." Turning to us he says, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee." What he prays for of God he distributes among men, by an authority vested in him by the Father. "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." My heart delights to think of the Lord Jesus Christ at this hour, not as a Gethsemane pleader, with groans, and agony, and bloody sweat; but as one who has finished his work, and who now reigns in the glory of the Father, having all power in heaven and in earth. He sends the blessing to those to whom it comes. His prayer is so infinitely effectual, that he practically gives the blessing himself. Has he not said, "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it"?

Notice, in the next place, that *this blessing is sure*. Aaron did not bless the people of his own will; he did not utter good words of his own composing; but there went forth a divine power which made the form of blessing to be a blessing indeed.

There was power in the priestly benediction. First, because Aaron was appointed by God himself to bless the people, and when he pronounced the benediction over the assembled multitude it was not Aaron's blessing, but the blessing of Jehovah, who had sent him. The God who set him apart to bless the people in the divine name was, by that very act and deed, engaged to make good his servant's words. Even so our blessed High Priest took not this office upon himself, but he was called thereunto; and his call is abundantly certified, "For him hath God the Father sealed." What our Lord says must stand, for he is commissioned of the Father; and anointed of the Spirit, as the ambassador of peace. God is in Christ Jesus, and the Godhead stands at the back of every word of mercy, every syllable of blessing which is uttered by the ever-blessed Son. I delight to think of my Lord as no amateur intercessor, taking up a work on his own responsibility without heavenly sanction; but he was appointed before all worlds to bless us, and God will confirm every benediction which his Son pronounces upon us.

But there is another reason for being certain that the benediction is sure to all the seed. Not only was the person chosen to bless the people, but the very words which he should use were put into his mouth. "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them." Here we have a fixed form of benediction, to which Aaron

was to restrict himself. Forms of prayer are not in themselves sinful: in some instances, forms are given in the Word of God, as in the Book of Psalms, and elsewhere. Free prayer is most useful, and it will ordinarily consort best with the movements of the free Spirit; but in the case of a benediction, it is well that it was dictated to the man of God. The children of Israel might miss blessing through the ignorance, or forgetfulness, or unbelief of Aaron; and therefore it was not left to him; but he had to learn by heart each word and sentence. In this wise, and in no other, was he to bless the people. I like this; for if God himself puts the very words into the mouth of his priest, then they are God's words. God himself arranged the three wonderful stanzas of blessing, and commanded Aaron to say so much, and no more. Not according to his own mind, or wish, or tenderness, or narrowness, does Aaron bless; but according to God's own mind must the fixed and predetermined benediction be given forth. Blessed be the name of God; the benediction is thus assured to us, for the words are his own. Even so the Lord hath put into the Saviour's mouth the words of blessing for us. Jesus said, "I speak not my own words, but the words of him that sent me." Every glorious proclamation of grace from the mouth of our Lord Jesus is a word given him by the great God himself. How our souls delight in this! I have heard people talk about the limitation of Christ's nature while he was here; and I fear their next step will be Socinianism. Beloved, every word that our Lord Jesus uttered was infallible. He fell into no errors of any sort. If he did err and *you* find it out, it is clear that you know more than your Master; and that sounds very like blasphemy. Christ is the wisdom of God, and the power of God; in the wisdom of God there can be no mistake, and in the power of God not one word shall fall to the ground. Wherefore, beloved, concerning this blessing, and every other that you find in God's Word, be certain that it is true. Rest in quiet assurance; for if God himself has appointed the priest to bless, and has given the very words which he is to utter, the Lord would compromise his own honour and glory if he were to run back therefrom. God himself in Christ Jesus declares that he will bless his people: yea, and they shall be blessed!

While dwelling upon the form of this benediction, observe that *it was to be continued.* It was not dependent upon the life of one man; for Moses was to speak unto Aaron "and to his sons." Aaron could not continue for ever by reason of death: in due time he must be stripped of his official garments, and die, like the rest of men; but then his son came in his stead, and the perpetual oblation and benediction were maintained. The blessing was not to cease from generation to generation. This was always to be one of the glorious offices of the high priest, that he should bless the people. Here I would dwell with pleasure upon my subject: the blessing of the Lord our God was upon his ancient people; but it is also upon us on whom the ends of the world are come. That blessing fell upon us in the beginning, when we were converted; and it has never ceased. The blessing of the Lord falls on us now as a refreshing dew, or as the golden rain when the corn is springing. The saints are for ever the blessed of the Lord. He blesses us to-day. There was a day when you felt very near

to the Lord your God, and you remember the Hermons and the Hill Mizars with regretful fondness. You enjoyed the divine blessing more that day than perhaps you do this morning; but, in very truth, the blessing is always the same. The sun's light is always the same, only our mists and fogs come in to hide his face. Our great Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, shines evermore with fulness of favour upon his people; but our doubts and fears, our worldliness and sin, come in like mists and hide his brightness. God towards his people is of one mind, and who can turn him? He blesses ever: he curses never. You can never say of the Lord that, towards his chosen, "out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing." No bitter waters are intermixed with the sweet streams of his grace.

I would add that *this blessing came frequently*. We do not know how often Aaron uttered this blessing upon the people. In this passage it is left without any determination as to times and seasons. It is something like our Saviour's Memorial Feast: we are nowhere told when and how often we are to celebrate the Supper of the Lord. Although it seems to me to have been the practice in apostolic times to break bread on the first day of the week, there is no law laid down. It is put thus: "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." So Aaron is not told that on such a day, and at such an hour, he shall bless the people; but he may do as his heart dictates. On the day of atonement, when the high priest came out from the secret place, he put on his robes of beauty, and blessed the people. I do not find that he was commanded to do so every day; but the Jews say that Aaron always blessed the people after the offering of the morning sacrifice, when the lamb had been slain and consumed upon the altar. This was not repeated in the evening. Of this we know nothing beyond the tradition; and I mention it mainly because the older divines were wont to say that Aaron gave a blessing in the morning, that is, in the first part of time, for then the ceremonial law stood; but that he can give no blessing in the evening; for now Christ himself has come in the end of days, and we have no need of a blessing from the Aaronic priesthood, seeing the great Melchizedek has come. There may be something in that tradition, and there may be nothing; but this I know, that Aaron did often bless the people, and this is to my mind full of comfort. The Lord Jesus is ready still to bless us. Have you few blessings? You limit them yourselves. You are not straitened in him; you are straitened in your own bowels. There is for you a blessing every morning: seek it when you wake. There is for you a blessing every evening: rest not till you feel it. There is a blessing for you at midnight, when you keep the watches wearily; and there is a blessing for you at midday, when you bear the noontide heat of care and toil. "Thy blessing is upon thy people": that is to say, it is always upon them. Our great High Priest doth not now and then bless the people; but from his lips grace distils as dew, and drops as rain, without ceasing. Our Lord is always blessing, and we are always blessed. Oh, for grace to know this, and to glorify the God of our blessings!

II. We will now consider THE BLESSING ITSELF. Oh, for renewed help from the Holy Spirit!

Notice, carefully, that this benediction *passes from the priest to God.* It is not, "I, Aaron, ordained of God, bless you, and like a shepherd I will keep you, and smile upon you, and give you peace." Oh, no! the blessing falls from Aaron's lips, but it comes originally from the Lord's heart and hand. It runs thus: "*The Lord* bless thee, and keep thee: *the Lord* make his face shine upon thee: *the Lord* lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Every blessing must come directly from God. What an honour was put on Aaron, to be made the mouthpiece of God! What an honour is put upon the preacher when he becomes the instrument, in God's hand, for cheering his people! What an honour is put upon you when, in talking with your children, or with your friends, you are privileged to be as a golden conduit-pipe, through which the holy oil of salvation flows to them! I pray you, seek much of this honour. Put yourselves in God's way, that you may be vessels for his use. Ask him to give you grace to seize upon every opportunity to speak what he would have you say. But, I pray you, never rest in the blessing of a man. Nay, if you were sure that such a man were sent of God, and he should, with all earnestness, invoke the best benison upon you, be not content with the man, but press on to the Master. Seek to have blessing first-hand from heaven. Covet a good man's blessing, and count it a treasure; but value it only because God speaks through the man.

This fact makes the blessing exceedingly precious. "THE LORD bless thee." What a blessing the Lord gives! Have we not heard a mother say to her little child, "Bless you"? What a wealth of meaning she threw into it! But when God says, "Bless you!" there are infinity and immutability in it. There can be no limit to the goodwill of the infinite God. *Our* gifts are like a handful of pence. God's gifts are so rich that I dare not liken them even to silver or gold. When Jehovah blesses, it is after the manner of his sovereign Almightiness. His benediction sheds joy and glory over our entire manhood. "The Lord bless thee"—what an ocean of blessedness is in it! "And keep thee"—what safe keeping is that! "The Lord make his face to shine upon thee"—what a shine is that! "And be gracious unto thee"—what grace is that!—the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. "The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee"—oh, to be countenanced of God! what fellowship that means! "And give thee peace." What a peace is that which God gives—the peace of God which passeth all understanding!

It behoves us to interpret the words of our text in the largest possible manner, and to look upon them as being not only waters up to the knees, but waters to swim in. Here we may cry, "Oh, the depth!" The Lord blesses his people "according to the riches of his glory by Christ Jesus." Do you know what his riches are? Can you measure the estate of God? Can you imagine what the riches of his grace must be? Here you have the riches of his glory; yes, and the greatest riches of his glory, by Christ Jesus. The Lord blesses you according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus; and what can be more? Dwell on that; I say no more.

I call your special attention, in looking over this benediction, to the fact that *the name of* THE LORD, *or Jehovah, is three times mentioned.* "Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee: Jehovah make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." It is the remark of scholars, that each one of these names bears a different mark in the original Hebrew. I will not say that this teaches the doctrine of the Trinity; but I must say that, believing the doctrine of the Trinity, I understand the passage all the better. The shadow of the Triune God is on the sacred benediction in the name thrice repeated. Yet is the Lord but one, for he says: "I will bless thee." Here we hear the voice of One, yet Three. We sang, this morning, a hymn beginning, "Holy, holy, holy"; for thus the heavenly worshippers salute the divine Majesty. They cry, "Holy, holy, holy," three times. Why not twice? Why not four times? Why not seven times? For this last, there might be a reason, since seven is the number of perfection. Trine expressions are most frequent in Holy Scripture; and what can this mean, but that the Lord who is one God for ever and ever, is also threefold in his existence and manifestation? We are to speak of him as "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty"; and we may pronounce the blessing upon the people in the name of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, still knowing that there is but one who has solemnly said at the close of the blessing, "They shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them." Let the sacredness of that name, and its being mentioned in this way, confirm you in the belief of the inscrutable mystery of the Three in One. What is this benediction now before us but an early form of the benediction used universally in the church of Jesus Christ in all ages? "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."

Taking the three sentences in the light now cast upon them the first sentence, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee," may be regarded as *the benediction of the Father.* It is the preservation of love. It is God who has hitherto kept you from falling. We are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." "He will keep the feet of his saints." "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." To the Father's tender care I would, at this hour, commend each one of you: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee." May he do this when thou art in great temptation, that thou yield not! May he keep thee from thine own evil heart of unbelief, that thou turn not aside! Contending with a sinful world, may he keep thee from its snares! Marching through a region full of seductions to error, may he keep thee from quitting the truth, even as he keepeth his own elect! The Lord bless thee with all good, and keep thee from all evil! They are well kept whom God keeps, and none are kept besides. There is no keeping like divine keeping. He saith: "I will be a wall of fire round about them"; and again, "He kept him as the apple of his eye"; and again, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." "The Lord is thy keeper." "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy

soul." We pray, "Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil," and the prayer is directed to "Our Father in heaven." I think you will find a depth of meaning in this first line of the holy hymn of blessing, if you regard it as the benediction of the Father. Do not so regard it exclusively, for there is no clear line of demarcation; each of the three stanzas melts into the other two, and the blessing is still one.

The next clause is *the benediction of the Son*, or the joy of grace: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." "The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee": this means the favour of God; may it be given to each one of you! You know where God's face is: we read of "The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." He that hath seen Jesus hath seen the Father. When our Lord smiles on us, we see the face of God—that face not veiled with frowns, but bright with smiles: a face full of love and favour, a face which was once turned away, but is now turned towards us in peace. "The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." Dearly beloved, is there any grace conceivable like the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? and is there any light conceivable like the shining of the love of God? A few moments ago the fog surrounded this place, and we seemed as if we were descending into pitch darkness; but, in an instant, light poured in through yonder windows, and there was an immediate change; and now the sun is shining upon us—a thing to be noted in this rarely sun-lit land. In this I see a symbol of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We come upon a period of gloom and deep depression, and midnight lowers upon our day; and then a breath of the heavenly wind chases away the fog, and the Sun of Righteousness rises, and the scene is changed. Let us have the favour of God, and all our troubles are less than nothing.

> "In darkest shades if he appear,
> My dawning is begun."

May we always walk in the light, as God is in the light; but that must be through the shining of his face. Through Jesus Christ we may enjoy an eternal sunshine. Even in heaven, "The Lamb is the light thereof." There is no light for us except through Jesus Christ. May the Lord Jesus be gracious to you! He is full of grace. To you that are in trouble to-day, may he be gracious with his consolations. To you that are fighting for him, may he be gracious in covering your head in the day of battle. To you that labour, may he put underneath you the everlasting arms of grace; and so may you have grace upon grace, and all the graces that you want till you enter into glory. Surely this second benediction is as full as it is brief. It is a box wherein all sweets compacted lie. Given the love of God the Father, and the grace of God the Son, our bliss runs high.

The third blessing is surely that of *the Holy Ghost*. "The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Here is the fellowship of peace. For God's face to shine is one thing, and a very precious thing; but for God to lift up his countenance upon us, is a still richer boon. To feel that God is dealing graciously with me, and

shining upon me, is very delicious; but to know that he countenances me, that he supports me in my acts, and is in fellowship with me—this is best of all. Oh, to think that, looking upon me, the Lord says, "Yes, my child, you are doing right; I countenance you in what you are doing." This is joy. Every servant has seen her mistress's face fall; but she is glad when the same face is lifted up upon her, because she has done well, and has given pleasure. I do pray that the Holy Ghost may countenance all of you who work for the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that you may say, "I have the countenance of God. No one applauds me: I am obscure. Many criticize me, and say that I am mistaken: others cavil and abuse. But, Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me, and it will more than suffice." To be countenanced by God is better than being commended by princes. Then follow the words, "And give thee peace": for when a man knows that God countenances him, then he enters into peace. Why should he fret when God smiles? What matters though all the world should censure, if Jehovah countenances his servant. A look of approval from God creates a deep, delightful calm within the soul. Brothers, may the Holy Comforter work this peace in you all!

But now, very briefly, notice that *this benediction is all along in the singular*. It is not, "The Lord bless you, and keep you"; but, "The Lord bless *thee*, and keep *thee*." Why? Because the people of God are one, and he views them as one; and so the blessing comes upon the entire church as a whole. But, next, I think it is that every individual believer may take the whole of this benediction home to himself. The high priest seems to say, not—"The Lord bless Ephraim and Manasseh, Judah and Benjamin"; but, as if he singled out each one of the assembly, he says, "The Lord bless *thee*, and keep *thee*." Dear brethren, I will not call you out by name, but I would say to each brother, "The Lord bless thee." I cannot, my sisters, name you in public, though you serve the Lord so well; but I will speak to you individually, and say, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; and make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; and countenance thee, and give thee peace." The blessing is meant for the appropriation of each one. While it embraces the whole church in one word, it yet distributes a full portion to each individual. We may each one take to himself the whole of this great benediction.

III. More I might have said upon this Old Testament benediction; but time fails me, and so I must conclude, by a word or two, in the third place, upon THE DIVINE AMEN.

The divine Amen is in the last verse: "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." Only two or three words will suffice.

Here is *the authority repeated*, by way of confirmation of what has been said: "They shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them." The priest does his part, and then the Lord makes the blessing effectual. Christ is authorized of God to put the name of God upon his people. It is a delightful thing for the Lord to call us by our own name, as it is written, "I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine." It is even more soul-enriching to have the divine name put upon us, so as to be called Sons of God,

Joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Herein is condescension on God's part, and honour and security for us. When the Lord's name is named upon anything, he will guard his own dedicated things. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, and within it we are safe.

I think I see here a confirmation of those blessings which are pronounced by good men. "They shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." I loved to have my grandfather's blessing, when I was preaching the Word in early days. He has now gone into the glory; but he blessed me, and none can take away the name of God from me. Most of you will remember the blessings of good men who are now gone to glory; and God confirms those blessings. He allows his people, whom he has made priests and kings unto God, to put his name upon others, and to pronounce blessings upon them. Their word shall stand, and what they bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. The blessing of your father and of your mother shall come upon you. The blessing of the angels of the churches, whom the Lord holds as stars in his right hand, shall fall on faithful believers and helpers as a dew from the Lord himself.

And then comes, best of all, *the blessing of our God most surely promised:* "And I will bless them." I will not attempt to preach from that little, great text—"I will bless them." I could enlarge upon it by the month. "I will bless them": they shall have their troubles; but I will bless them through their troubles. When they have earthly goods, I will bless them and make them real comforts. I will bless their basket and their store. If those earthly comforts are taken away, I will give them compensation a thousand-fold in myself. I, who gave the mercies, will allow no one but myself to take them away; and this shall only be done in love, that I may bless them still more. Brethren, the world may curse us; but if God bless us, the curse will be as the whistling wind. Friends may become enemies, or may forget us; but, if God blesses us, we can bear the wound. God blessed us when we were young, he kept us in the giddy paths of youth; he blessed us in our hale manhood, and helped us when our family cares were upon us; and he will still sustain us now that we lean heavily on the staff, and find the grasshopper to be a burden. He will bless us when sickness lays us low; and when we come to die Jesus will bless us with dying grace for dying moments, and hand us out our best things last. We shall wake up in the likeness of Christ, and then we shall be satisfied with his blessing, being transformed into the image of him by whom the blessing comes. The judgment-day shall dawn, the earth shall pass away, but the Lord will bless us. God's "will" has an eternal range. When God saith, "I will," all the devils in hell cannot turn aside the blessing, and all the ages of eternity cannot change the King's word. "I will bless them." How much he will bless them he does not say; but the great I who makes the promise blesses like a God. God himself will bless his people, directly, and personally. "I will bless them." Here is absolute certainty based on the faithfulness of the Lord: here is endless mercy certified by the divine eternity and immutability. Do you whisper, "But the Lord sends us trials"? I answer, It is true. What son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But in this is a covenant blessing;

for every twig of the rod shall bring forth to them the comfortable fruits of righteousness ere many days are past. You do not need that I should say another word. Go home with this celestial music in your ears, "I will bless them."

This blessed assurance does not belong to you all indiscriminately. We have no blessing for those who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. O sinners, God make you conscious that you are outside of the blessing; and may that terrible fact create in you an aching heart, and a longing soul, which nothing can ever rest but the blessing of the Lord God.

You that are resting in Jesus, hear these words, which I have read you from the inspired Book, and may the Holy Ghost write them on your minds. Thus saith Jehovah of his people, "I will bless them." The Lord has caused his servants to bless us by the testimony of the gospel, and now he himself blesses us by his Spirit. He will himself bring his precious things to our door. He will himself feast us at his table, yea, he will himself become our food, our bread, and our water. Come, let us bless the Lord. Since he has so blessed us, let us heartily bless him. We will wind up our meditation by singing—

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!"

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxx.; Numbers vi. 22—27.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—152, 190, 433.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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RUNAWAY JONAH, AND THE CONVENIENT SHIP.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 9TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, August 10th, 1890.

"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish."—Jonah i. 3.

SAD sight! *Here is a servant of God running away from his work.* As well see the stars wandering from their spheres. When we read that he fled from the presence of God, we do not suppose that Jonah thought that he could get away from God as to his omnipresence; but he wanted to escape serving in the divine presence: he wished to avoid being employed by God in his special service as a prophet. He thought that the Lord might call him, and send him upon errands, if he went to Nineveh; for Assyria had some measure of evident relationship to the Lord and his people; but if he could once travel as far as Tarshish, he would be out of the world altogether, and would no more have to speak in the name of the Lord. He imagined that there could be no relationship between Tarshish and Israel, and he would not be expected to do any further prophetic work; or, if he did, he would not suffer in repute, for the report would not reach Jerusalem. If he did not want to get away from the toilsome and self-denying duty of prophecy, he did, at least, wish to avoid an expedition to the heathen of Nineveh—an expedition which, he foresaw, would not be for his own honour.

Now, why did he desire to get away from his work? Whatever reason he had, it must have been a bad one; for no servant of God ought, on any account whatever, to think of quitting the service of his Lord. We should not wish to avoid the doing of the Lord's will; but when we know what our duty is, we ought to follow it out with unswerving determination. We must not wish to leave our post, no, not even to go to heaven. We ought not to be sighing to be gone. Employers do not like a man who is always looking for Saturday night. Let him attend to the work of Tuesday, and Thursday, and

Friday, and the week will end quite soon enough. One does not like to see a fellow standing about, stretching his arms upward, and sighing, "The week is very long; I wish it was Saturday." You like a man who means to do a fair day's work for a fair day's wage, and who does not watch till you turn your back that he may slacken his labour. We must not be crying, "Oh that I had wings like a dove!" What should we do with them if we had them? Such heavy mortals as some of us are had better keep nearer the ground. Whatever reason anyone thinks he has for avoiding the Lord's work, the reason is as vicious as the thing he is aiming at; for children of God have no right to leave the service of their heavenly Father, and, when they do so, it is at their own peril.

What was his reason? Was it, in part, that he considered the work to be too great for him? Certainly he had a great task appointed him. "Nineveh, an exceeding great city of three days' journey," how was one man to admonish and evangelize the whole of it? Preposterous! Might he not have been aided by at least one colleague? Even Moses had his Aaron. Why did not the Lord send forth a college of prophets, or an army of preachers, and bid them go and divide the vast city into districts, and hold services in all the large halls, and at the corners of the streets, or even visit from house to house? Must one man be pitted against hundreds of thousands? Would a single voice be heard amid the noise of a city which was full of tumult? The odds were great against the lone man. Was that why Jonah ran away? I think not: but it has been the cause of the flight of many others. Is there a servant of God here who feels unequal to his work, and therefore wishes he could escape from it? My dear brother, you are unequal to your work, for you have no sufficiency of your own. I know also that I am, in and of myself, unequal to my own calling; shall we, therefore, run away? No, no; that is not the true line of argument; this is the reason why we should stick to our work all the more closely. Every hard thing can be cut by something harder, and the most difficult work can be done by stern resolution. But if the work cannot be well done by us, how will it be done without us? If our diligence seems too little, what will our negligence be? If there is too much for us to do, should we therefore leave undone what we can do? God forbid! Pluck up courage, my brother, and in your own personal weakness find a strong reason for getting to your work; for, "When I am weak, then am I strong"; and the strength of God is made perfect in our weakness. With more prayer we shall have more power. I hardly think that fear of being overdone was Jonah's reason for deserting his post.

Why did Jonah wish to run away? Because he did not like the Ninevites? I think that there was something of that on his mind. He was a stern old Jew, and he loved his race, and he felt no desire to see anything done for the Gentiles or for the heathen outside the Abrahamic covenant; and therefore he had no passion for a mission to Nineveh. Is there anybody here who does not want to go to a certain service because he does not like the people? Will you flee unto Tarshish to get away from a dreaded sphere? Are you backing out of your duty because those with whom you are to serve are not

quite to your taste—too ignorant or too cultured, too countrified or too polite? Come, my dear brother, this must not be. Be not of a cross, morose disposition, as Jonah undoubtedly was; but if the men to whom you are sent are worse than others, let that be a call for you to go to them first, even as the apostles were to "begin at Jerusalem." If those to whom you are sent are greater sinners than others, they need Christ all the more; and if you have heard a very bad character of them, surely there is a call for you to elevate them. However, I am not sure that this was very much Jonah's case, though it may have been one of the many arguments that worked together to produce his undutiful behaviour.

Was it not, possibly, because Jonah knew that God was merciful? "Now," said he to himself, "if I have to go through Nineveh and say, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,' and, if these people repent it will not be overthrown; and then they will say, 'Pretty prophet that Jonah! He is a man that cries "Wolf" when there is no wolf,' and I shall lose my reputation." Do I address any servant of God here who is afraid of losing his reputation? This is not a reason which will stand examination. My brother, that is a fear which does not trouble me. I have lost my reputation several times, and I would not go across the street to pick it up. It has often seemed to me to be a thing that I should like to lose, that I might no longer be pressed with this huge throng, but might preach to two or three hundred people in a country village, and look after their souls, and stand clear at last to God about each one of them; whereas, here am I tied to a work I cannot accomplish—pastor to more than five thousand people! A sheer impossibility! How can I watch over all your souls? I should have an easy conscience if I had a church of moderate size, which I could efficiently look after. If a reputation gets one into the position I now occupy, it certainly is not a blessing to be coveted. But if you have to do anything for Christ which will lose you the respect of good people, and yet you feel bound to do it, never give two thoughts to your reputation; for, if you do, it is already gone in that secret place where you should most of all cherish it. The highest reputation in the world is to be faithful—faithful to God and your own conscience. As to the approbation of the unconverted multitude, or of worldly professors, do not care the turn of a button for it; it may be a deadly heritage. Many a man is more a slave to his admirers than he dreams of: the love of approbation is more a bondage than an inner dungeon would be. If you have done the right thing before God, and are not afraid of his great judgment-seat, fear nothing, but go forward. I think that there was a little of regard for reputation in Jonah; possibly a great deal.

But still there was a higher and a better motive, though even that was a bad one; for anything is bad, however true and excellent in itself, that leads a man to run contrary to God's mind. It was this. He thought that the character of God himself would suffer; for if he went down to Nineveh and proclaimed, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," then the people might repent, and Jehovah would suffer them to live; and then, after a while, the people would say, "Who is Jehovah? His word does not stand fast. He does not

carry out his judgments. He lays his hand on the hilt of his sword, and then pushes it back into the scabbard." Thus the Lord himself, by his mercy, would lose his name for truth and immutability. Jonah would have preferred the destruction of Nineveh to the least dishonour to the name of the Lord. Have you never felt as if you could wish that God would execute judgment on deadly forms of error, and cruel forms of oppression? Have you not been half weary of his longsuffering? I stood at the bottom of Pilate's staircase in Rome. Pretentious imposition! It is said to be the staircase down which our Lord came from Pilate's hall; and there are certain holes in the wood which covers the marble, wherein are said to be seen the drops of blood which fell from our Lord's bleeding shoulders. As I saw people going up those stairs on their knees, and the priests looking on, it occurred to me that, if the Judge of all would lend me his thunderbolts for about five minutes, I would have made a wonderful clearance. It was the Jonah spirit stirring me, and I felt I did well to be angry. But, you see, the good Lord did not empower me to be an executioner; and I am right glad that he did not. Have you never felt a zeal for the Lord of hosts, which led you, like John, to wish to call fire from heaven? Did you not feel half sorry that the Lord withheld his anger when it seemed necessary to execute vengeance in order to maintain the honour of his gospel? Have you not almost said, "Oh, that he would punish such tremendous iniquities"? Not long ago, when these streets of ours were ringing with stories of licentious infamy, did you not feel as if something must be done, something terrible, to sweep away the dens of lust, and cleanse the Augean stables of pollution? But God did nothing in the way of plague, or war, or famine. In his longsuffering he passed by the transgressors, and allowed them still to go on in their wickedness, as he has done these many years, bearing and forbearing, if haply men may come to repentance. This is a trial to righteous souls.

That, I think, was the great fear that lay in the heart of Jonah; for he said to God, when God had spared the city, "I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." This was not because the people were spared, but because he thought God had lost his honour by not fulfilling his threatening.

I have given too much time to these excuses of Jonah. If you have any excuses for not doing what you ought to do, turn them out of doors, and never let them in again. Away with them! Away with them! You need not even take the trouble to repeat them to yourselves, or to judge their comparative value; they are all mischievous. If you are a servant of God, obey him at once without question. If you are not a servant of God, God grant that you may be; for, if you are not his servant, you are his foe; and if you turn not to him through Jesus Christ, and do not find mercy at his hands, what will become of you?

Now I come to the text. Jonah desired to go away from his prophetic work by journeying to the out-of-the-way place called Tarshish;

and when he came to Joppa, which was the port of Jerusalem, he found a vessel bound for the place which he desired to reach. May we be taught of the Holy Spirit certain practical truths from this incident!

I would teach you four things.

I. The first is, that WE MAY NOT FOLLOW OUR IMPULSES TO DO WRONG. Jonah felt it come upon him, all of a sudden, not to go to Nineveh, but to Tarshish. "Tarshish! Tarshish!" was constantly whispered in his ear, till he had Tarshish on the brain, and go he must.

Now, I very commonly meet with persons who say, "I felt that I must do so and so. It came upon me that I must do so and so." I am afraid of these impulses—very greatly afraid of them. People may do right under their power, but they will spoil what they do by doing it out of mere impulse, and not because the action was right in itself. People far oftener do very wrong under impulse, and I feel it needful to give a warning to any here who are prone to be so led. Our impulses are not to be depended on; our thoughts run wild. Do you say, "It came into my mind all of a sudden to do so and so"? and do you think this a good reason for your act? You are much mistaken. Do you say, "It flashed upon me to do so"? Do not let this be the rule of life. As well follow a will-o'-the-wisp as follow these freaks of fancy. You must never obey an impulse to do wrong. Now, in Jonah's case, the impulse was, "Go to Tarshish. Go to Tarshish." I dare say that he could have pleaded that he felt pressed in spirit to do so. "Go to Tarshish, go to Tarshish," was still beaten upon the drum of his soul.

Now it may be that the impulse is to do a very brave thing. To go to Tarshish was a daring act. Jews never took well to seafaring. They were a land-loving people. Will Jonah go in a ship? We, nowadays, think little of it; but the Hebrews thought it a very terrible ordeal to go upon the sea. And then, to go to Tarshish—to the utmost ends of the earth: who but the men of Tyre would venture so far? These Hebrews did not know what kind of a place Tarshish was; but Jonah is bold to go. Some of you who are now in the Tabernacle ought to be on the Congo, or in North Africa, or in India, or in China; but you do not go from want of courage. Yet, you see, men are bold enough when bent on going wrong. They will take great leaps in the dark; whereas others are afraid to follow the right along a far safer way. Jonah will go to Tarshish. He is not afraid of the sea, or the storm, or anything; but although the impulse may seem to call him to that which is brave and noble, it is evil, for it leads him to oppose the plain command of God.

Impulses may also appear to be very self-denying. It was disagreeable to go to sea, and to leave his native land and all its associations. Yet on this point of self-denial it is easy to go wrong. A man may be worshipping self by practising what he calls self-denial. The devil can readily use this as a raiment of light under which to hide the demon of arrogant self-righteousness. Men may fast from bread that they may gorge their souls on pride.

It seemed also that *he might have claimed liberty in this matter.* Surely he might go to Tarshish if he liked. It is true he was a prophet; but

could he not quit the service if he wished? Does God turn men into slaves that they may serve him? Surely, a prophet may make an excursion, and take a holiday! If he did not feel happy in going to Nineveh, was it right for him to go? Have you never met with this form of argument? I have heard people speak about sacred duties in this style. Take, for instance, believers' baptism—they believe that it is Scriptural, but they say, "I never felt called upon to attend to it." As if we were not called upon to obey every command of Christ! I have heard persons say, "No doubt it is in the Word of God; but I have never felt it laid home to me." What a wicked thing to say! If I had a boy, and I gave him a command, and he told me that he did not feel it "laid home," and therefore should not obey me, I think I should take care to lay it home very soon in a way which he might not appreciate. I believe that when Christian people trifle with known duties, their heavenly Father will soon find a rod to fit their backs. A tender conscience looks to the Word of the Lord, and longs in all things to be conformed thereto. What do you want beyond the command of God? If an angel were sent from heaven to command you to obey, the command would not be more binding upon you than it is now. The Lord has given you liberty; not liberty to sin, but liberty to obey. Never talk of freedom to do wrong. It is a horrible thing for one to say, "God loves us to be free in our service of him; and therefore I shall not serve him, but follow my own impulses."

At the same time, Jonah was violating his conscience, *running counter to the inner life*. As a servant of God he was bound to go where he was commanded, and he was fighting against that which was to him a necessary element of life. O friends, take care of defiling your consciences! Whatever you do, never trifle with conscience. If you are going to make a gash in yourself anywhere, make it in your ear, or in your nose, but not in your conscience. The wounding of your members would pain you, and might injure your beauty; but a wound in your conscience is a far more serious matter, since it touches the centre of life. A gash in the conscience may disfigure a soul for ever. Let conscience speak to you in all things, and do not follow fancy. Weigh the impulse in the scales of conscience; and if it is not such that conscience can guarantee it to be consistent with the mind of God, let the impulse alone. We are no more to follow vain impulses than cunningly-devised fables; but the Word of the Lord is to be our leading star in all things.

Persons who talk about their impulse *will often do what they would condemn in others*. This ought to open their eyes to their dangerous proceeding. If anybody else had run away to Tarshish when he was told to go to Nineveh, Jonah would have seen his wrong, and would have rebuked him with all his might. I should like to have seen Jonah analyzing Jonah's case; just as David judged and condemned the rich man who took the poor man's ewe lamb, and then found that he had been judging and condemning himself. I should like to make some of you into jurymen upon your own cases. I am sure that you would censure yourselves in burning language for those very things which you now allow. How clearly would you see the disgrace of a man's running away from the plain path of righteousness because he

had a miserable impulse urging him to do wrong! Why, you can see the absurdity of it now. Will you, then, go on with a like course yourself? Will you flee to Tarshish when God bids you go to Nineveh? Shall self rule? Shall the flesh be pleased?

This pretence of impulse is what *none of us would allow to be an excuse if it were made the rule of conduct towards ourselves.* If any person had an impulse to knock us down, we should not see the propriety of it. If he had an impulse to rob us, we should feel an impulse to call in a constable. If any man had an impulse to wrong us, we should appeal to the law for protection. In the same way, if we feel an inward incitement to do what we ought not to do, let us not be so silly and so wicked as to imagine that the law will be relaxed because of the evil movements of our mind. I think it needful to take this text and speak in this way, because I have seen several examples of men following, not the Word of God, not the law of righteousness, but some idle movements of their own minds, to which they attached an authority which did not belong to them. I am ready to say, "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" But they half imagine that these fancies come from God, whereas God is not the author of evil desires and suggestions. It is much more likely that these thoughts come from the devil; and most of all likely that they rise from a foolish and corrupt heart. If anything says to you, "Flee to Tarshish," when God says, "Go to Nineveh," shut your ears against the evil impulse, and hasten to do as God bids you. What have you to do with the devices and desires of your own hearts? Are these to be a law to you? I pray you, be not among the foolish ones who will be carried about with every wind of fancy and perversity. "To the law and to the testimony," should be your cry, and you may not appeal to inward movements and impulses.

II. My second remark is this: WE MAY NOT TAKE A WRONG COURSE BECAUSE IT SEEMS EASY. Jonah says, "I will go to Tarshish." And he goes down to the port of Joppa, and there he finds a ship just going to Tarshish. How easy a thing it often is to carry out an evil purpose! My dear hearers, whether you are Christians or are not Christians, I want to put you on your guard against the idea that, because a certain course in life is very natural and easy, you may therefore follow it, though it is not right.

Remember that *the way of destruction is always easy.* "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, and many there be which go in thereat." The way to hell is downhill; and this is easy travelling. Because it seems easy, natural, and almost inevitable for you to go along a certain questionable road, do not therefore dream that this gives you a license to follow it. You have reason to suspect a course in life in which there is no difficulty; for righteousness is by no means an easy thing. If a course of conduct should be difficult, you may the more surely reckon upon its being right; for "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Remember that to do wrong will always be easy while our carnal nature is what it is. Men can always find, somewhere or other, the means to rebel against God. The old proverb is, "You can always find a stick to beat a dog with"; and I only quote it to show that in

some things the will always ensures the way. Man can always find ways of sinning against God. I remember, in my younger days, a schoolboy, who, when at play with his companions, would fly into furious passions, and would at once throw something at the person with whom he was angered; and the point I noticed was, that he always found something to throw. Let him be in the schoolroom, or in the playground, or in the street, there would surely be a stone, or a book, or a slate, or a cup ready to his hand. So is it with men who fight against the Lord; they discover weapons everywhere, in the fury of their rebellion. The evil brain is quick in devising, the depraved heart is swift in apprehending, and the sinful hand is deft in carrying out any and every scheme of disobedience to the Lord. When a man wishes to sin, it is always easy to sin; and therefore the readiness of any mode of action is no argument in its favour.

Satan also labours to make men sin, and his cunning is great. When he tempted Jonah to go to Tarshish, the evil one knew that there was a ship at Joppa waiting for a fair wind to sail for Tarshish; therefore he whispered into Jonah's ear, "Go to Tarshish," because he knew that he would not be thwarted in following out the base suggestion. Our tempter has a complete acquaintance with what is going on in the world, and therefore he can plot and scheme so that his suggestion shall be supported by events which are transpiring. He is not omniscient, but his army of spies keeps him well posted up. He can therefore fit his temptations to our surroundings.

The way of sin may well be easy, since *evil men will help you that way*. If anything wrong is to be done, the sons of Belial will lend a willing hand. Thus an evil device may well succeed, since all the world pulls that way. Only set up a calf, and the tribes will haste to cry, "These be thy gods, O Israel." Sin is soon made popular. All men will praise the evil way which yields them pleasure. In the rush along the downward road the eager crowd will carry you off your feet, and bear you with them down to destruction without your needing to exert yourself, and therefore it is generally easy to go wrong: it is swimming with the stream, flying with the wind.

Moreover, *good things are always difficult*. God makes them so for purposes of discipline to his people. He that can persevere in goodness, when made to suffer by it, is good indeed. It is, moreover, an increase to the honour of saints that they are enabled to do the right thing under great opposition, and to fight their way to heaven, foot by foot, at the sword's point. If virtue were so very easy, where would be the honour of it? To glory and immortality we climb up-hill.

Do not, I pray you, fall into the delusion that, because an evil act looks to be the next thing, the inevitable thing, therefore you may do it. The law is not, "Do the easiest thing," or some would be very virtuous. *Would you excuse other people for injuring you on the ground that it was easy to do so?* Somebody in your house pilfers, robs you of your trinkets or your cash; but you do not accept the excuse that such things were so readily got at, that it was natural for the thief to take them. A man only opens his mouth and takes away your character: is the ease of slander an excuse for it? A person signs your name to a cheque, and gets the money for it: is it a valid excuse when he says,

"I have a great facility in imitating handwriting: forgery is very simple and remunerative, and you can hardly blame me for trying it on"? No, friends, you denounce the thief, the slanderer, the forger; and even so will you be denounced if you fall into the sin which doth so easily beset you. I doubt not I am pricking the conscience of some who will do anything for a quiet life; and are gradually slipping down to hell, because the way there is so smooth that they delight in it, so easy that their sloth prefers it. I know how many are excusing themselves for doing wrong, because it is in their case so natural, while to do right would cost so great a trial. O sirs, take yourselves out of the deadly atmosphere which renders the sleep of sin almost sure to overtake you. Excuses are soon fabricated: I pray you, quit that unrighteous business, and, at all costs, follow after that which is good. Begin by faith in Jesus, and then go on to build up a holy character. May the Holy Spirit work it in you!

III. Now, we will go a step further. WE MAY NEVER PLEAD PROVIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENT AS AN EXCUSE FOR DOING WRONG. There could hardly ever be a more remarkable instance of apparently providential co-operation than we have here. Jonah wants to go to Tarshish; and having selected that place as the region of his hiding, he must needs go down to Joppa, on the Mediterranean sea. He walks on the quay, and the first thing he sees is a ship going to Tarshish! Is not that a providence? Boats did not make that voyage often. Do we not confess that it is a providence when we learn that the vessel will take passengers at a set fare? Jonah wants to go to Tarshish, and the very day that he gets to Joppa, a decked vessel is about to start for the remote region which he desired to reach. No one can refuse to see an apparent providence. This is often used as a cover for wicked actions. "I could not do otherwise," says one; "providence seemed to point in that way. I should have been flying in the face of God if I had not done as I have done." Ah, me! how base is man, to seek to saddle his sin upon God! How grossly you deceive yourself! If Jonah was so persuaded, he was soon cured of his error. Two or three hours after, when they woke Jonah from his sleep in the sides of the ship, and he saw that awful storm, did he then consider that a gracious providence had led him into that tremendous tempest? He soon wished himself anywhere else than on the great sea. When they were about to throw him out to the fishes, he did not say much about providence; he was too much convinced of his own folly to blame his God. I have seen a man in trade doing certain tricky things, and he has tried to make it out that the circumstances compelled him thereto. "Such and such a person walked in just at the nick of time, and said certain things, and another event occurred so remarkably pat to the case, that it all looked like a providential arrangement; and everyone who saw it would have thought so." Nonsense; nothing can make it right to do wrong. I pray you, never blaspheme God by laying your sins on the back of his providence. This is an act of daring presumption and profanity. You will never see a providence more remarkable than that which occurred to Jonah; and yet Jonah, for all that, was rebelling against the Lord in going down to Tarshish. Providence or no providence, the Word of the Lord is to be our

guide, and we must not depart from it under pretext of necessity or circumstances.

It is very easy to make up a providence when you want to do so. If you sit down and try to find in the ways of God to you an excuse for the wrong which you mean to commit, the crafty devil and your deceitful heart together will soon conjure up a plea for providence.

The man who shot another in malice might say that providence led him to carry his gun that morning; the burglar providentially met with a companion, who wished to relieve a householder of his spare plate; the petty pilferer saw goods lying unprotected near a tradesman's door, and they providentially happened to be exactly what he wanted. It will not do. The pretence is too barefaced. Yet I fear that many, who think themselves Christians, are deluded by this wicked argument.

Such a method of reasoning would have led many into sin who are famous in history for their virtue. The three holy children would have escaped the fire, and Daniel would never have been in the lion's den, if they had been guided by what men call providences. But note other plain instances—such as Joseph. Joseph's mistress is so kind to him, and he is in such a splendid position as head of the household, it is hard for him to deny her desire and lose his place. Had not providence put him into his fortunate position? Shall he throw it away? When his mistress tempts him, shall he risk all? Would it not be better to think that providence plainly hinted that he should comply? Joseph was not so base as to reason in that fashion. He knows that adultery cannot be tolerated, and so he flees from his mistress, and leaves his garment in her hands, rather than remain near her seductions. Look at David, too. He is brought out by Abishai upon the field at night. There lies king Saul, sound asleep; and Abishai says to David, "God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time!" What a providence, was it not? The cruel foe was altogether in David's hands, and the executioner was eager to settle all further conflict by one fatal stroke! What could be clearer or simpler? Wonderful providence! Yet David never said a word as to providence, but replied, "Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" He therefore came away, and left the king sleeping as he was. He would not follow opportunities, but would keep to the law of his God. I pray you, do the same; and if ever everything seems to lead up to wrong-doing, and many circumstances unite to steer you in that direction, do not yield to them. Your guide in life is not a so-called providence, but an unquestionable precept of the Lord. Do as God bids you, and do it at once. God help you to follow where he has laid down the lines! By his Spirit may he lead you in the way everlasting; for the path of obedience is the way of peace and righteousness.

A so-called providence *has often been a pretext for wrong-doers.* I dare say that many have erred through looking at circumstances rather than at commands. Look at Lot. Lot went and dwelt in Sodom, among a godless, filthy set of Canaanites. He had been with Abraham in the

separated life before, but now he quitted tent life for a city dwelling, with its foul surroundings. Why did Lot go Sodom way? He looked, and saw its well-watered plains; and as he had flocks and herds, it seemed a providence that he was able to go there, and that his uncle Abraham had left him free to choose. Did not providence say, "Go to the well-watered plain of Sodom"? What could be more plain? I have known a sort of providence speak in that fashion to certain Christian people, who were growing rich, and desired to get into what is called society: they jumped at the first chance, and fell into bad company. They entered upon a trade which promised to pay them well. True, it was a bad trade, a perilous trade to him that carried it on, and a ruinous trade to those drawn into it; but then it would pay well. It was the well-watered plain of Sodom, and they pleaded that they could not wisely forego it. Others will go to live in a certain district, where there is no gospel preaching, and they leave all their friends, and their Bible-class, and every opportunity of usefulness, for the sake of the hedges and the birds. Providence has found them a spot where they can be as idle as they like. When men go into dangerous courses, they thus speak of providence. Fine providence, is it not? Alas for Lot! in the end he had to read over again those lessons of providence by the light of the blazing cities of the plain. Think, also, of Aaron. He, on one occasion, fell so low as to try to throw his sin upon providence. When he had been making the golden calf for the people to worship, and his brother Moses sharply upbraided him for it, he declared that the people were ready to stone him, and when they brought their gold, he said, "Then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf." It is true the image came out, but it had first been moulded and put in. Aaron wanted to make Moses believe that a special providence made the metal form itself into the shape of the ox-god. A wretched falsehood! Alas, that the priest of the Most High should palter with truth in this manner! And so there are people who tell you wonderful stories about what has happened to them, and what has led them into their way of evil. Blessed for ever be the providence of God! Let the Lord be worshipped and adored; for he is good, and doeth good, and good only! His providence is always holy. Far hence be every blasphemous charge against it! Never let us avail ourselves of opportunities to do evil; and if we dare to do so, let us not saddle the blame of it upon the thrice-holy God.

Would you excuse any other man who should do you wrong, on the ground of providence? Suppose a thief broke into your house, and said that it was a providence that you had not fastened the back-window, or that the fastening was so easy to open. Suppose he said that providence spared him a good deal of trouble because your drawers were not locked, nor your money put into the iron safe. What would you say about such providences? A person deceives you in business and takes you in, and he says that it was a very remarkable providence that put you in his way. Do you endorse such talk? Why, you would not listen to the fellow for a moment; and will you listen to your own self, when your heart begins to make the holy Lord an accomplice in your transgressions? No, no, there are devil's providences as well as divine providences; and there are misreadings of providence, and wretched

perversions, whereby the Holy One of Israel is grossly insulted and provoked.

Thus have I briefly given you three words of caution, and the fourth is like unto them.

IV. WE MAY NOT EXCUSE OURSELVES IN DOING WRONG BY THE LAWFULNESS OF AN ACT IN ITSELF. What is right in another may not be right in me. That which another might do without offence may be a grievous wrong in a child of God.

For the mariners to go to Tarshish was right enough. We do not say that in itself it was wrong to go by sea to Tarshish. There would be an end to trade if ships might not roam the watery plains. Yes, my dear friend, it may be quite right for certain persons to pursue a course which you must not even think of. For the Tyrian sailors to go to Tarshish was their business, their calling, their duty; but it was very different with the prophet. It was not Jonah's business, calling, or duty; why should he go to Tarshish? There is a solemn difference between being at sea in the path of duty, and going there to escape service. He did exactly as the sailors did; I mean that, as a matter of form, it was the same; but they were right, and he was wrong. They did not go on board to escape from the service of God; but he was doing so, and that made all the difference. Two men may do the same thing, and the one may be improving his grace by doing it, and the other may be increasing his damnation by doing it. After all, it is the motive that must rule our judgment of the action. Beware of defending your transgression from the fact that others may do it without being censured.

But might not Jonah be allowed to go to Tarshish if he wished? *Yes, it might, under certain circumstances, have been right for Jonah.* When he was off duty, it might have been good for his health for him to go to Tarshish; but it must not be so when God says to him, "Go to Nineveh." You may not do that which is contrary to the Lord's will, even though, in itself, the action may be innocent. We may not say, "I have a right to do it." We have no right to do otherwise than as the Lord commands. We have no right to do wrong; and the more God loves us, and the more sure we are that we are his children, the more are we bound to follow closely in the way of truth and holiness. We are not saved by works; but because we are even now saved, we desire, in all our ways, to glorify him who has saved us by his most precious blood. O dear heart, if thou be indeed a servant of God, thou wilt know that obedience is liberty, holiness is freedom. To the pure in heart sin would be bondage, while to do what God commands would be liberty. By grace we will to do the will of the Lord.

It was no excuse for Jonah's sin that he acted in an honourable manner in the doing of it. It is true that Jonah paid his fare, and that this was right, if he meant to take his passage. "He found a ship going to Tarshish, and he paid the fare thereof." He did not steal on board and try to get a free passage as a stowaway. But someone asks, "When he had paid his fare, had he not a right to go?" Yes, he had, as far as the captain of the vessel was concerned; but he had no right before God. After paying his fare, how could he decline to

go? He would lose his money, and that would be foolish. Yes, it is very easy to construct excuses for wrong courses, but they will hold no water. Apologies for disobedience are mere refuges of lies. If you do a wrong thing in the rightest way in which it can be done, it does not make it right. If you go contrary to the Lord's will, even though you do it in the most decent, and, perhaps, in the most devout manner, it is, nevertheless, sinful, and it will bring you under condemnation.

Servants of God, you are under a higher law than anybody else. Redeemed with precious blood, chosen of God by his sovereign grace, made heirs of eternal glory, it is yours to "perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord" by his good Spirit, and so to do whatsoever he says to you, neither turning aside to the right hand nor to the left.

Thus have I shown you that there is teaching in the incident at Joppa. I think it is legitimate teaching, from the fact that, when Jonah wanted to do evil, everything seemed ready to his hand; and yet he was doing grievously wrong. May this warning be useful to some of you by God's grace! I do not know for whom this sermon is meant, but I have felt bound in spirit to deliver it. It is intended as a warning for somebody who is hearing it, or shall hereafter read it. Perhaps some dozen or two may find it applicable to their cases, and, if it comes home to your consciences, I charge you, by the living God, do not turn a deaf ear to it. Let it search you through and through. Let it not only plough you, but scarify you, and cross-plough you, and have its full effect upon your heart; and then, feeling that you have sinned, cast all your idle excuses to the wind, and come to Jesus just as you are. Come to Jesus, and find pardon for all your inexcusable sins. As long as you are sewing together the fig-leaves of excuse, you will never come to Jesus for true covering; but when you have done with the spider's webs of foolish argument, the Holy Ghost will bring you to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, if you wished to go to Tarshish, it would be a great providence if you found a vessel bound for that port; but if you want to go to Jesus you may always go to him. You may go to him now. Sitting in that pew you may come to Jesus. If you go to Tarshish, you will have to pay the fare. There is no fare to pay in coming to Jesus. To him it is, "Come and welcome." His salvation is free, gratis, given to all who are willing to receive. It is not to be bought by way of merit, or of money; but it is to be had freely by the way of sovereign grace. I know that the impulse of yonder young man is to fly away from Christ, and hope, and heaven: the Lord help him to resist the impulse! Your mother begged you to attend the house of God: the inclination is to go out for country strolls: resist the wish, and hear the gospel. Many go to Tarshish, and are lost. I know that the temptation to yonder young woman is to forsake the way of righteousness, to follow after gaiety, and so to go to Tarshish. Shut your ears to every whisper of the deluding foe; and, however easy it may be for you to obey his suggestion; however even providence may seem to make a way for you, regard not the voice of the tempter, and do not dishonour the Lord your God by supposing that he can really invite you by his providence to do that which he forbids you by his Word. Hearken to

me, and *come to Jesus. Come to Jesus now.* Perhaps to-night, if that young man does not come to Jesus, he will be lured into a den of vice, and led into desperate sin, and for many a year he will not again feel that tenderness which is stealing over him just now. Trifle not with the wooings of grace, lest you be ensnared by the lies of Satan. The man is strongly tempted now: a voice incessantly cries in his ears, "Go to Tarshish." I conjure you, O my tempted brother, nerve yourself to fight with this demon. Instead of hearkening to his alluring note, let the voice of mercy have power with you. God the Holy Ghost grant that it may be so. "Come unto me," says Jesus, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Seek not Tarshish, but Calvary. If you run from the presence of the Lord, a storm will pursue you, an angry sea will open its abysses for you. There may be no fish for you, no friendly whale to carry you to shore; but you may be lost for ever. O man of God, run not away from your work! O sinner, lust not after vain and empty pleasure! Child of God, come back to him from whom your heart has wandered, and, henceforth, by his grace, be diligently his servant to the end. Sinner, thou that hast gone far away from peace and hope, hear thou the heavenly voice to-night which warns thee of thy danger. Cry, "I will arise, and go to my father." He will come to meet you. On your neck he will fall. He will kiss you, wash you, clothe you, save you, and you shall praise him world without end. Happy, indeed, shall I be if I have taught some souls to give up their dissembling and excuse-making, and if I have persuaded them to make full confession of sin before the Lord Jesus, who will wash them till they are without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jonah i. and ii.

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PATIENT JOB, AND THE BAFFLED ENEMY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, AUGUST 28TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."—Job i. 22.

THAT is to say, in all this trial, and under all this temptation, Job kept right with God. During all the losses of his estate, and the deaths of his children, he did not speak in an unworthy manner. The text speaks admiringly of "all this"; and a great "all" it was. Some of you are in troubles many; but what are they compared with those of Job? Your afflictions are mole-hills contrasted with the Alps of the patriarch's grief. "All this"! He was suddenly reduced from a peer to a pauper; from a man of great wealth to a person in absolute poverty; from a happy father to a childless mourner. Who can measure or fathom "all this"? Yet, "In all this Job sinned not." Here was the triumph of a gracious spirit. Ah, dear friends! if God could uphold Job in all this, you may be sure that he can support *you*. Look to him for this divine support.

"All this" also alludes to all that Job did, and thought, and said. He was full to bursting with swelling grief, he shaved his head, and rent his garments, and he lifted up his voice unto the Lord his God; but "In all this Job sinned not." He rose up, for he was a man of action, a man of a sensitive and powerful mind, a man of poetic energy, who could not fail to express his emotions in striking symbols; but "In all this Job sinned not." This is a great deal to say of a man when you see him in the extreme of trial. If in patience he can possess his soul when all the arrows of affliction are wounding him, he is a man indeed.

May we ourselves so live that it may be said of us in the end, "In all this he sinned not. He swam through a sea of trouble. The roll of his life-story is written within and without with lamentations; but in all this he did not dishonour the name of his Lord. He did and said many things; but in them all he was patient, resigned, obedient, and never uttered a rebellious word." Let us think of the wonderful case of Job in a practical way; desiring the Holy Spirit to make us like him.

I. Our first head shall be, IN ALL OUR AFFAIRS THE MAIN THING IS, NOT TO SIN. It is not said, "In all this Job was never spoken against," for he was spoken against by Satan in the presence of himself; and very soon he was falsely accused by men who should have comforted him. You must not expect, dear friend, that you will pass through this world, and have it said of you in the end, "In all this no one ever spoke against him." I heard say of one man, "He was a man who never had an enemy." I ventured to add, "nor a friend." He has no friend who never had a foe. Those who secure zealous lovers are pretty sure to call forth intense adversaries. A man who is such a chip in the porridge that he never offends, is pretty sure to be equally flavourless in the other direction. The trimmer may dodge through the world without much censure; but it will seldom be so with an out-and-out man of God. Because he is not of the world, the world will hate him. The blessed and holy Lord Jesus was slandered to the utmost. God, the ever-blessed, was himself libelled in Paradise itself by an old servant, who had turned into an old serpent; and, therefore, you must not wonder if you are abused also. To go through life without calumny is not a thing to be expected; but it is anxiously to be desired that we may go through every phase of joy or of sorrow without falling into sin.

Neither is it a chief point for us to seek to go through life without suffering, since the Lord's servants, the best of them, are ripened and mellowed by suffering. Amos, the herdsman, was a bruiser of sycamore figs—a kind of fig that never ripened in Palestine unless it was struck with a rod, and thus was bruised. I fear me, there are very few of the godly who will fully ripen without affliction. The vine bears but little fruit unless it makes the acquaintance of the knife, and is sternly pruned. I fear that much fruit will seldom be forthcoming without much tribulation. A high character might be produced, I suppose, by continued prosperity; but it has very seldom been the case. Adversity, however it may appear to be our foe, is our true friend; and, after a little acquaintance with it, we receive it as a precious thing, the prophecy of a coming joy. It should be no ambition of ours to traverse a smooth path without thorn or stone. Rather let us ask—

> "Shall Simon bear the cross alone,
> And all the rest go free?
> No, there's a cross for every one,
> And there's a cross for me."

Dear friends, I think also that it should not be our ambition to go through the world without sadness of heart. It is true that heaviness of heart is worse than bodily suffering: "A wounded spirit who can bear?" Some persons, however, seem to endure terrible trouble without much feeling. They are case-hardened, stout-hearted, thick-skinned persons; and truly I have half envied them at times, and almost prayed to lose that sensitiveness which causes fear; but it would be a very doubtful blessing. We need to be tender, that we may feel the slightest touch of God's hand. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." The

apostle says, "Though now for a season, if need be, *ye are in heaviness* through manifold temptations." Many read it as if there were a needs-be for the trial; and so, indeed, there is; but the needs-be in the passage has reference to being in heaviness. If you can bear trial without ever being heavy, it is scarcely a trial to you. "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil." It is the ache of the ache, it is the sting of the wasp which works effectively on the heart. If we do not smart under the rod, what is the use of it to us? Therefore I would not have you ask that you may be kept from sadness of soul; but I would have you pray seven times a day from the very bowels of your being, "Lord, keep me from sin." May it be said at the last, of every one of us, that in all this we sinned not!

Remember, if the grace of God prevents our affliction from driving us into sin, then *Satan is defeated.* Satan did not care what Job suffered, so long as he could but hope to make him sin; and he was foiled when he did not sin. He must have regretted that he tried him, when he found that he could not make him sin. I think I hear the friend muttering, "Give him back his camels; give him back his sheep; if by the loss of these his patience and resignation are made manifest." If he could not extract a rebellious speech from Job, the tempter had lost all his cruel efforts: his malice had spent itself without result. If he could not make the good man sin, nor charge God foolishly, he was defeated, and God was glorified. If in enduring your particular trouble, my dear friend, you do not fall into sin, you are more than a conqueror over him that hateth you. The arch-enemy will fly away confounded from you, if you are able to resist him while darkness covers your soul. If you conquer him in your hour of grief, you conquer indeed. May your conflict with Apollyon be like that of Christian in "Pilgrim's Progress," and to you also may a monument be erected, bearing this inscription—

> "The man so bravely played the man,
> He made the fiend to fly;
> Whereof a monument I stand
> The same to testify."

If you do not sin while under the stress of heavy trouble, *God will be honoured.* He is not so much glorified by preserving you from trouble, as by upholding you in trouble. He allows you to be tried that his grace in you may be tested and glorified. When one Winstanley, years ago, built a lighthouse on the Eddystone Rock, he said that he was sure that it would stand any storm that ever blew, and he should himself like to be in it in the fiercest tempest that ever drove adown the Channel. It came to pass that he was in his own erection one night, and there came a tremendous blast, which swept him and his lighthouse clean away, so that he was never heard of more. He courted trial because he believed in his work: God permits trial because he knows that his wisdom and grace have made us able to bear it. The lighthouse which was afterwards built on the Eddystone has had all manner of storms beating upon it, but it has outlived them all; and therefore its builder's name is held in honour. Even thus our God is glorified in every trial of his saints, when their grace enables

them to endure with patience. "There," says he, "see what grace can do, what suffering it can endure, what labours it can perform!" Grace is like an athlete performing before the great King and his heavenly court. A cloud of witnesses look down upon the feats of faith, and note with joy how it achieves everything which the Lord appoints it to perform. It even enters into contest with the fiend of hell, and gives him a signal overthrow; and he that made the athlete, and trained him for the contest, is honoured thereby. If you do not sin in your trouble, your endurance of trial will bring glory to God.

Remember, furthermore, that if you do not sin, *you yourself will be no loser by all your tribulations.* Sin alone can injure you; but if you remain steadfast, though you are stripped, you will be clothed with glory; though you are deprived of comfort, you will lose no real blessing. True, it may not seem a pleasant thing to be stripped, and yet if one is soon going to bed, it is of no great consequence. It is no easy thing to part with wealth; but if thereby you are unburdened, the loss is a gain. A child of God may have the knife sharply cutting him, but if it only removes the superfluous wood, it may be of the utmost benefit to the fruitage of the tree; and that is the main thing. If the metal in the pot loses none of its gold, all that it does lose is well lost, and is, indeed, really gained. Though you be reduced in circumstances, what matters it, if you are enlarged in spirit? Though you be sick in body, what matters it, if the soul's health be furthered thereby? To sin would be terrible; to abide in holiness is triumph. In all our affliction may there be no defection. The Lord may send us a ton of trouble, but this will be better than an ounce of sin. Do not let all your prayer run after deliverance from sorrow, but first of all pray, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." Seek first the kingdom of God, and obedience to him, and then deliverance shall be added unto you. We are permitted to say, "Lord, keep us from trouble"; but we are commanded to pray, "Deliver us from evil." Should trials come to us, even like those which happened to Job, it shall be well with our souls if our hearts are not drawn or driven into sin.

II. And, now, a second thought arises out of the text. IN ALL TIME OF TRIAL THERE IS SPECIAL FEAR OF OUR SINNING. It is well for the child of God to remember that the hour of darkness is an hour of danger. Suffering is fruitful soil for certain forms of sin. Hence it was needful for the Holy Spirit to give a testimony to Job that, "In all this he sinned not." It looked as if he must sin; but yet he did not sin; and this is recorded by inspiration as a memorable fact. He still held fast his integrity, and bowed before the will of the Lord. Dear friends, if you are approaching a season of trouble, watch and pray that, in entering upon trial, you may not also enter upon sinning. Many have sorely grieved their God by what they have said and done in the hour of sorrow.

For instance, we are apt to *grow impatient.* We murmur against the Lord. We think our trial is too long, or that prayer is not answered when it ought to be. If God be faithful, why does he not hasten to deliver his child? In the olden time he rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind; but why are

his chariots now so long in coming? The feet of his mercy seem shod with lead. Petulance and complaining are sins which easily beset those who are severely tried. Men are apt to have bitter thoughts of God when he puts his hand into the bitter box, and brings out the quinine of sorrow. Of the two sexes, women usually carry the prize for patience, especially in bodily sickness. As for us, who are made of rougher stuff, it is to our shame that we are, as a rule, very impatient of pain. We do not so much lose our patience as show that we have none. Job under his first set of trials was not swift to complain; for ye have heard of the patience of Job, which the Holy Spirit takes care to mention in the New Testament.

We are even tempted to *rebellion* against God. I have met with cases in which rebellious words have been uttered, and even spoken again and again. One said in my hearing, "God has taken away my mother, and I shall never forgive him. I can never think of him as a God of love as once I did." Such words will cause a child of God more pain than the loss itself would have occasioned. I heard one say of his dying child, whom I was called in to visit, that he could not believe that God would be so unjust as to take his daughter from him. Indeed, he spoke so rebelliously that I, with all gentleness, but with deep solemnity of soul, admonished him that I feared the Lord would visit him for such proud speeches. It was clear that his child would soon die, and I feared that he would die himself, when the shock came, because he so stoutly quarrelled with the Lord. I said to myself, "A child of God cannot speak in this way about his Father without coming under further chastisement." It came to pass as I expected, and he himself was laid low. Grieved as I was, I was by no means surprised. How can we rebel against God, and hope to prosper in that rebellion? With the froward he will show himself froward; and we shall find out what a world of misery that will bring us. Oh, for grace not only to yield because we must, but because we trust! May we say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good"! Before that temptation Job did not fall; for in this respect he sinned not.

We may also sin by *despair*. An afflicted one said, "I shall never look up again. I shall go mourning all my days." Dear friend, why not be cheerful again? Are God's mercies clean gone for ever? Thou art bidden to believe always. "Who is among you that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." In the dark is the place for trust, not for despair. A child that is sullen will probably make for himself ten times more misery than the rod of itself would cause him. Who dares despair while God bids him trust? Come, if you are as poor as Job, be as patient as Job, and you will find hope ever shining like a star which never sets.

Many sin by *unbelieving speeches*. I have repeated one or two naughty things that God's children have said; but Job said nothing of the kind; he bravely said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Men have been driven into *a kind of atheism* by successive troubles. They have wickedly argued—"There cannot be a God, or he would not let me suffer so." Beloved, you must not speak as the foolish do;

and such speech is sheer folly. Your mouth would be greatly defiled if you were thus to vex the Holy Spirit. Has the Lord saved you, and will you speak against him? I have no time to say more where so much might be added. The Lord preserve us in trying times from sinning either with heart, or hand, or lip.

III. Notice, thirdly, that IN ACTS OF MOURNING WE NEED NOT SIN. Hearken: you are allowed to weep. You are allowed to show that you suffer by your losses. See what Job did. "Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped"; and "in all this Job sinned not." The mother wept much over her child, and yet she may not have sinned: a mother's grief and a mother's love are sacred things. When a dear child is mourned over, those may have been not only perfectly natural tears, but even holy tears. The husband lamented sorely when his beloved was taken from him. He was right. I should have thought far less of him if he had not done so. "Jesus wept."

But there is a measure in the expression of grief. Job was not wrong in rending his garment: he might have been wrong if he had torn it into shreds. He was not wrong in shaving his head: he would have erred had he torn out his hair, as some have done whom despair has turned into maniacs. He deliberately took the razor and shaved his head; and in this he sinned not. You may wear mourning: saints did so in other times. You may weep; for it may perhaps be a relaxing of your strained emotions. Do not restrain the boiling floods. A flood of tears without may assuage the deluge of grief within. Job's acts of mourning were moderate and seemly—toned down by his faith. I wish that Christians did not so often follow the way of the world at their funerals, but would try to make it clear that they sorrow not even as others that are without hope. You may wear black so long that it becomes the ensign of rebellion against the will of the Lord.

Job's words also, though very strong, were very true: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." If we say no more than the truth, we may say it if the tone is not that of murmuring; although perhaps sometimes it might be better to be altogether silent, like Aaron, who held his peace. David said, "I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." If we cannot maintain a golden silence, yet let our speech be silver: we must use nothing less than precious metal.

Job mourned, and yet did not sin; for he mourned, and worshipped as he mourned. This is what I commend to you who are mourning at this time. If you must fall on the ground, worship there before the Lord. If your heart is bowed down, emulate the holy ones who fall on their faces and worship God. I believe that some of the truest, purest, sweetest, and strongest devotion has come to God from hearts that were breaking with grief. Remember, then, that in acts of mourning there is not, of necessity, any sin.

IV. But, fourthly, IN CHARGING GOD FOOLISHLY WE SIN GREATLY. "Job sinned not," and the phrase which explains it is, "nor charged God foolishly." Here let me say that *to call God to our judgment-seat at all is a high crime and misdemeanour.* "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Woe unto him that contendeth with his

Maker. The Lord is absolutely sovereign, and he giveth no account of his matters. We are usurping fools when we pretend to sit in judgment upon the Judge of all the earth.

In the next place, *we sin in requiring that we should understand God.* What? Is God under bonds to explain himself to us? Do we threaten to revolt unless he will put himself right with us? Blessed be his name, he is inscrutable, and I am glad to have him so. Do you want your God to explain his dispensations? Are you not content to believe him? The demand for explanation is unbelief. This is, indeed, making yourselves to be wiser than God. Let us bow before him without a question. He is Jehovah, and that ends the matter. He would have his children feel that what he wills is always best. Bow before God, and prostrate your desire, and thought, and judgment before his throne. What he does is wise, and true, and kind; and of this we are sure. We can very easily charge God foolishly, but we had better not charge him at all; for who are we that we should call the Eternal to account?

We charge God foolishly *when we imagine that he is unjust.* "Ah!" said one, "when I was a worldling I prospered; but ever since I have been a Christian I have endured no end of losses and troubles." Do you mean to insinuate that the Lord does not treat you justly? Think a minute, and stand corrected. If the Lord were to deal with you according to strict justice, where would you be? If he were now to call you to account for your sins, and lay bare the naked sword of justice, what would become of you? You would be at once in despair, and very soon in hell. Never charge upon the Lord a failure of justice, for this is to sin with a vengeance.

Some, however, will *bring foolish charges against his love.* "How can he be a God of love if he permits me to suffer so?" You forget that word—"As many as I tenderly love" (for that is the Greek word), "I rebuke and chasten." The more the Lord loves you, the more surely he will rebuke any and every evil that he sees in you. You are so precious to him, that he desires to make you perfect in every good work to do his will. God prizes you much, my sister, or you would not have to be so often ground upon the wheel to take away all excrescences and make the jewel of your soul to shine. "Oh," said a worldling to me when I was in great pain and weakness of body, "is this the way God treats his children? Then I am glad I am not one." How my heart burned within me, and my eyes flashed, as I said that I would take an eternity of such pain as I endured sooner than stand in the place of the man who preferred ease to God. I felt it would be hell to me to have a doubt of my adoption, and whatever pain I might suffer was a trifle so long as I knew that the Lord was my God. Every child of God under such a taunt would feel exceeding jealous for the honour of his Lord. Beloved, we are willing to take the divine love with every possible drawback that can be conceived; for the love of our Father is a weight of glory, and all the sorrows of time are but "light afflictions," and they last but for a moment. How sweet to hear the Lord say—

> "In love I correct thee thy gold to refine;
> To make thee, at length, in my likeness to shine"!

Alas! at times, unbelief charges God foolishly with reference to *his power*. We think that he cannot help us in some peculiar trial. Throw to the winds such fears; they are unworthy of us, and dishonouring to our Lord. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Through flood and fire he will bring us in safety.

We may be so foolish as to doubt *his wisdom*. If he be All-wise, how can he suffer us to be in such straits, and to sink so low as we do? What folly is this? Who art thou, that thou wouldst measure the wisdom of God. Shall an owl begin to compute the light of the sun? or an emmet estimate the eternal hills? Shall some tiny animalcules, sporting with myriads of others in a drop of water, begin to trace the bounds of the sea? What art thou? Who art thou, that thou shouldest set thy judgment against that of the Lord God Almighty? Less than nothing; wilt thou censure the Infinite? A worm of the dust; wilt thou arraign the mighty God? This be far from thee. Job did not so, for he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

V. Lastly—as I must close in haste—TO COME THROUGH GREAT TRIAL WITHOUT SIN IS THE HONOUR OF THE SAINTS. If we are tried, and come forth from it naked as when we were born, we need not be ashamed; but if we come out of it without sinning, then the greatness of the affliction increases the honour of our victory. "In all this Job sinned not": the "all this" is a part of the glory with which grace covered him. Suppose that your life was all ease: suppose that you were brought up tenderly from a child, well educated, left with a sufficient fortune to gratify every wish, happily married, free from sickness, lifted above care, grinding labour, and heavy sorrow: what then? Assuredly you could never be noted for patience. Who would ever have heard of Job if he had not been tried? None would have said of him, "In all this Job sinned not." Only by his patience could he be perfected and immortalized. Suppose that your record should be: from birth a sufferer, throughout life a struggler; at home a wrestler, and abroad a soldier and a cross-bearer; and, notwithstanding all this, full of joy and peace, through strong believing: tried to the uttermost, yet found faithful. In such a chronicle there is something worth remembering. There is no glory in being a feather-bed soldier, a man bedecked with gorgeous regimentals, but never beautified by a scar, or ennobled by a wound. All that you ever hear of such a soldier is that his spurs jingle on the pavement as he walks. There is no history for this carpet-knight. He is just a dandy. He never smelt gunpowder in his life; or if he did, he fetched out his scent-bottle to kill the offensive odour. Well, that will not make much show in the story of the nations. If we could have our choice, and we were as wise as the Lord himself, we should choose the troubles which he has appointed us, and we should not spare ourselves a single pang. Who wants to paddle about a duck-pond all his life? Nay, Lord, if thou wilt bid me go upon the waters, let me launch out into the deep. Those who are uplifted to the heavens by the billows, and then go down again to the deeps as ocean yawns, these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. Discomforts and dangers make men of us, and then we deal no more with childish things, but with eternal matters. If we had no troubles, we should in the end be dumb for lack of themes to

speak upon; but now we are storing up incidents worth the telling to our brethren when we join the family circle before the throne. Tried souls can tell of the infinite mercy and love of God, who helped them, and delivered them. Give me an interesting life, after all; and if it is to be an interesting life, then it must be one that has its full share of trouble, as Job's had. Then shall it be a heaven to hear the verdict of the great Judge: "In all this my servant sinned not."

The honour of a Christian, or, let me say, the honour of God's grace in a Christian, is when we have so acted that we have obeyed in detail, not forgetting any point of duty. "In all this Job sinned not," neither in what he thought, or said, or did; nor even in what he did not say, and did not do: "In all this Job sinned not." We are apt to purpose that we will shut ourselves up in our own room, and never go out into the world again, or attempt to speak or act any more. Surely, that would be a great blank, and a blot upon our lives. No! No! No! We must not say, "I will speak no more in the name of the Lord." Go on speaking, go on acting, go on suffering. Breast the wave, Christian! Swim to the other shore; and may God's infinite mercy be seen in bringing you there! Crowd your life with action, and adorn it with patience, so that it shall be said, "In all this he sinned not." God grant us a detailed obedience, a following of the Lord fully, a perfect working out of the minute points of service!

I feel that I must add just this. As I read the verse through, it looked too dry for me, and so I wetted it with a tear. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly"; and yet I, who have suffered so little, have often sinned, and, I fear, in times of anguish, have charged God foolishly. Dear friends, is not this true of some of you? If so, let your tear follow mine. But yet the tear will not wash out the sin. Fly to the fountain filled with blood, and wash therein from sins of impatience, sins of petulance, sins of rebellion, sins of unbelief. These are real sins, and they must be washed away in the blood of the Lamb. Oh, how dear that fountain is to us! how dear to you who have often to lie in bed and suffer—for you still sin! How dear to us who have health and strength wherewith to serve God, for we see sin in our holy things, and we need to be purged from its defilement. You that go into business every day, and mix up with all sorts of persons, how much you have need of daily washing! Come, beloved, let us go together, and say, "Lord, forgive us."

I should like to say somewhat to some of you who are not God's people. Suppose I were to sum up your lives, and wrote it out in this fashion: "Was fond of gaiety; spent many days in frivolous amusement; was sometimes drunken; occasionally would use profane language," and so on. How falsely should I speak if I were to say, "In all this he sinned not"! Why, in all this you have done nothing else but sin. God has loaded your tables, and clothed your backs, and kept you in health, and prolonged your lives, and in all this you have done nothing else but sin and act towards God foolishly. I want you to come, then, to that same fountain of which I spake, and cry to-night, "Wash me, Saviour, or I die." You have been the very opposite of Job. You have sinned in all your comforts and your mercies, and have never shown due gratitude to the blessed God, but have done

evil against him. The Lord bring us all to his feet, and then may he help us in all future troubles to stand firm, and not to sin. I know that some of you are entering upon fierce trials. You have the prospect of it on your minds to-night, and sitting here you feel depressed about it. Do not begin to despond, but be doubly diligent in prayer. Be more concerned to be kept from sinning than from suffering, and daily pray, "Lord, if thou wilt lead me by this rough road, yet keep my feet that I stumble not, and preserve me even to the end with garments unspotted from the world! I will ask no more of thee but this one thing. Holy Father, keep me as a dear child, obeying and serving thee, with all my heart, and soul, and strength, till I go up higher to dwell with thee for ever!" May the Lord hear you all in the day of trouble, and preserve you to life's latest hour, without spot and blameless! Then shall he be glorified in you, and you shall have joy. Amen, and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job i.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—758, 744.

Mr. SPURGEON is engaged in building a Mission Hall and Schools, Penrose Street, Walworth, as a memorial of his years of preaching in the Surrey Gardens. At the present moment he is much in need of help. Trusting alone in God to help him through this necessary work, he yet feels it to be right to let sermon-readers know that now is an opportunity for showing their sympathy with the preacher. Immediate aid would tend to make his mind more restful during the time of his holiday, and it would create special gratitude in his heart. Replies to this appeal should be directed to Mr. SPURGEON, Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington Butts, London.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

LITTLE FAITH AND GREAT FAITH.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 16TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Morning, November 2nd, 1890.

"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"—Matthew xiv. 31.
"O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."—Matthew xv. 28.

BETWEEN the very lowest degree of faith and a state of unbelief there is a great gulf. An abyss immeasurable yawns between the man who has even the smallest faith in Christ and the man who has none. One is a living man, though feeble, the other is "dead in trespasses and sins"; the one is a justified man, the other is "condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." The weakest believer is on the road to heaven; the other, having no faith, is going the downward road, and he will find his portion at last among the unbelievers—a terrible portion indeed.

Although we thus speak of believers as all of one company, yet there is a great distance between weak faith and strong faith. Thank God, it is a distance upon the one safe road—the King's highway. No gulf divides little faith from great faith; on the contrary, little faith has only to travel along the royal road, and he shall overtake his stronger brother, and himself become "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." I want to quicken some of the more tardy travellers along the sacred way. I would have doubts slain and faith revived. I want Mr. Feeble-Mind, and Mistress Much-Afraid, and Miss Despondency, and the whole tribe of the little ones, to take heart of hope this morning, and observe that they have not yet enjoyed all that the Lord has prepared for them. Although a little faith saves, there is more faith to be had: faith which strengthens, gladdens, honours, and makes useful, is a most desirable grace. It is written, "He giveth more grace," and therefore God has more in readiness for us. Little faith may increase exceedingly until it ripens into full assurance with all its mellowness and sweetness.

There are three things I am going to attend to. The first is *little faith gently censured:* "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" In the second place, *little faith tenderly commended;* for it is no small

boon to have any faith at all, even though it has to be called little. Thirdly, I shall conclude by speaking of *great faith as much more to be commended*. In this last matter I shall dwell upon our Master's gracious words: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

I have read in your hearing two stories in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of this Gospel according to Matthew. It is memorable that the incidents, illustrating little and great faith, come so closely together. I shall take it for granted that you have the stories of Peter and the Canaanitish woman clearly before your minds. Keep your Bibles open while I preach; and may the Spirit of God open your hearts to understand them!

I. First, we have LITTLE FAITH GENTLY CENSURED.

What shall I say about it, to begin with, but this?—that *it is frequently found where we expected greater things*. This man who is chided for little faith is Peter. Peter, to whom the Lord had communicated a very clear knowledge of himself; Peter, the foreman of the twelve; Peter, in after-days the great preacher of Pentecost; Peter, who has been exalted by some into the primate or pope of the apostolic church, though he claimed no such position; this is Peter, who was a true piece of stone from the foundation rock, Peter, to whom the Master gave the keys, and to whom he delivered the commission, "Feed my sheep," and "Feed my lambs." It is Peter, to whom Jesus says, "O thou of little faith." And, my dear brother or sister, may it not be true that you have obtained great mercy, enjoyed high privileges, received gracious protection, and been eminently favoured with fellowship with Christ, most near and dear? By this time you ought to be strong in faith. But yet you are not so. You will soon be home; your grey hairs are silvered with the light of Immanuel's land; you can almost hear the singing of the saints across the narrow stream. At your time of life, so long taught of God, so deeply experienced in the things of Christ, you ought to be fathers in faith, whereas you are still children; you ought to be mothers in Israel, and yet you are mere babes. Is it not so? Why is this sad fact so undeniable? Solomon spake of the cedar in Lebanon, and of the hyssop on the wall: but I have too often seen a hyssop on Lebanon, and I have sometimes seen a cedar upon a wall: I mean, that I have seen great grace where there seemed to be nothing to assist it, and I have seen little grace where everything was advantageous to its growth. These things ought not so to be. You and I, who are no children now; you and I, who are no longer coasters, but have launched out into the deep, and have had experience in many a storm; you and I, who are no strangers to our Lord now, for the King hath often brought us into his banqueting-house, and his banner over us has been love; we ought to be ashamed if we are still lamenting our little faith. It is an infirmity in which we cannot glory, for unbelief is exceeding sinful. Well might the Master lift his finger to some who are sitting in these pews this morning, and say to us one by one, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Continuing our very gentle censure, we note that *little faith is far too eager for signs*. I do not think that Peter's faith became suddenly

little: it was always little, and the sight of the boisterous wind made its littleness apparent. When he said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water," his faith was weak. Why did he want to walk on the water? Why did he seek such a wonder? It was because his faith was little. Strong faith is content without signs, without tokens, without marvels. It believes God's bare word, and asks for no confirming miracle; its trust in Christ is such that it asks for no sign in the heavens above, or in the seas beneath. Little faith, with her "If it be thou," must have signs and wonders, or she yields to doubt. Joyful meditations, remarkable dreams, singular providences, choice answers to prayer, special fellowships—little faith must be having something out of the common, or she collapses. The perpetual cry of little faith is, "Show me a token for good." Little faith is not satisfied with the bow which God doth set in the cloud, but she would have the whole heavens painted with celestial colours. It is not satisfied with the usual portion of the saints, but must have more, do more, and feel more than the rest of the disciples. Why could not Peter have kept in the ship like the rest of his brethren? But, no: because his faith was weak he must quit the deck for the deep; he cannot think that it really is his Master walking on the sea unless he walks with him. How dare he ask to do what his divine Lord was doing? Let him be content to share his Lord's humiliation: he ventures far when he asks to partake in a miracle of Omnipotence. Am I to doubt unless I can do miracles like those of my Lord? But this is one of the failings of weak faith: it is not content to drink of his cup and be baptized with his baptism; it would share his power, and partake in his throne.

Weak faith is apt to have too high an opinion of its own power. "Oh," says one, "Surely you are wrong. Is it not the error of weak faith to have too low an opinion of its own ability?" Brethren, no man can have too low an opinion of his own power; because he has no power whatever. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Without me ye can do nothing"; and his witness is true. If we have strong faith we shall glory in our powerlessness, because the power of Christ doth rest upon us. If we have weak faith, we shall diminish our trust in Jesus and put into our hearts instead of it so many measures of confidence in self. Just in proportion as faith in our Lord is weakened, our idea of ourselves will be strengthened. "But I thought," says one, "that a man who had strong self-reliance was a man of great faith." He is the man who has no faith at all; for self-reliance and Christ-reliance will not abide in the same heart. Peter has an idea that he can go upon the water to his Master: he is not so sure of the others, but he is clear about himself. James, and John, and Andrew, and the rest of them, are in the ship: it does not occur to Peter that any one of these can tread the waves; but he cries, "Lord, if it be thou, bid *me* come unto thee on the water." Self-consciousness is no attribute of faith; but it is a nest for doubt. Had he known himself, he might have said, "Lord, bid John come to thee on the water; I am unworthy of so high a dignity." But, no: being weak in faith, he was strong in his own opinion of himself, and he hurried to the front, as usual; hastened into a pathway that was quite unfit for his trembling feet to

tread, and before long found out his error. It is weak faith that allows of high ideas of self. Great faith hides self under its mighty wings.

Note another point about weak faith: *it is too much affected by its surroundings.* Peter went on pretty well till he noticed that the wind tossed the waves about tremendously, and then he was afraid. Are not many Christians too apt to live by what they feel and see? Do we not often hear a young beginner say, "I know that I am converted, for I feel so happy"? Well, but a new frock will make many a girl happy, or a few shillings in the pocket will make a youth rejoice. Is this the best evidence that you can bring? Why, if you are very troubled, it may be a better sign of conversion than feeling happy. It is well to mourn over sin, and struggle against it, and try to overcome it: this is a sure mark of grace; a far surer one than overflowing joy. Ah, believer! you will be happy in the highest and best sense if you trust in Jesus; but you will soon lose your happiness if your happiness becomes the ground of your confidence. Happiness is a thing that depends upon how things happen. It is too often hap-ness, and nothing more. It is too much a hap-hazard thing. But faith rests in Christ whatever hap may happen; and so it is happy in the happening of sorrow and grief, because it relies wholly upon God. Faith rests upon the Lord's faithful word and promise, come what may. "Ah!" says another, "I feel very low and dull. I am heavy even when I try to pray; I cannot pray as I would like." And so you doubt your salvation because of that, do you? Does your salvation depend upon the liveliness of your prayers? It is the mark of weak faith, that it is all up, and then all down. If we live by feelings, brethren, we shall live a very wretched life; we shall not dwell in the Father's house, but we shall be a kind of gipsies, whose tents are too frail to shut out the weather. God save us from being like the barometer, which at one time is "set fair"; but "set fair" with the barometer does not last long, it is back again to "rain," and it drops down to "much rain," before we know where we are. Strong faith knows where its true standing is, and, perceiving this to be unchanging, it concludes that its foundation is as good one day as another day; for its standing is in Christ. As the promise upon which strong faith leans is not a variable quantity, but is always the same, so its rest is the same. Our faithful God will save all those who put their trust in him; and there is the top and the bottom of it: we need not go any further. But poor weak faith is always looking out to see whether the wind is in the east; and if it be so, down she goes. Is the wind quiet? Peter walks on the wave. Does the wind howl? Peter begins to sink. This is weak faith all over. It pins us down to its environment. God help us to rise out of it!

Weak faith, in the next place, *is forgetful of its constant danger*, and has not learned to believe in the teeth of it. When Peter was walking on the waves, he was in as much danger as when he began to sink. Practically, he never was in any danger at all; for Jesus, who enabled him to tread the sea, was equally near all the way. When he was standing, he could not have walked another step if the Master had not upheld him; and when he began to sink, his Master was still able to prevent his drowning. Would his Master withdraw the divine strength,

and suffer his poor servant to perish? Peter's strength is gone; but will his Master take away the divine strength, and leave him to perish? Weak faith frequently makes this mistake; she does not know that she is at all times in extreme danger, wherever she may be, when she looks to herself; and that she is never in any danger, wherever she may be, if she looks to her Lord. If you get a cloudy view of your confidence, and begin to trust, not in Christ pure and simple, but in Christ Jesus as you enjoy him, in Christ as you are like him, or in Christ and yourself as taught by him: if you allow any amalgamations in your trust, they will turn out to be adulterations; and when a sense of danger falls upon your mind, you will not know where to turn for the re-establishment of your confidence. Strong faith takes Jesus only as her basis; but feeble faith tries to add thereto. Beloved, weak faith tries to make up for want of confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ with an indistinct confidence in herself, or her works, or prayers, or something else. If Peter had been trusting wholly in Jesus, whether he walked on the billows, or sank in the waves, he had done what his Master told him to do, and the reason of his safety was not in the least affected by the wind. If his reliance be on Jesus only, the ground of his confidence is never questionable. I pray that we may climb above that weak faith which rises and falls with the passing incidents of this life's story.

Weak faith, when conscious of her danger, swings as a pendulum to the opposite extreme, and *in an instant exaggerates her peril.* One moment Peter walks upon the sea; the next moment he is going to be drowned. It is a curious thing that he never thought of swimming. When the soul trusts Christ it is spoiled for reliance upon self. When once a man has found out the way to walk upon the top of the water, he forgets his skill in swimming in it. Self-confidence goes when confidence in Christ comes in. It was the Lord's will that Peter should know his weakness, and should most clearly see that his standing depended upon his faith, and that faith found all its strength in the Lord Jesus. Down goes Peter; and now it is, "Lord, save me." He is at his wits' end. Peter is going to be drowned—drowned with the Master standing by! He will die while Jesus lives. Will he? He will perish when he is doing what Jesus bade him do! Do you think he will? It is evident he has that fear upon him. I have been foolish enough to feel that I should sink under trouble and need. It is folly. Having mixed up our confidence in brighter days, when dark days come, a large part of our confidence is gone, and we fear that we shall perish. Have not some of you that believed in the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, yet said, "I shall one day fall by the hand of the enemy"? You know that Christ has promised to keep you; and yet, because you are not quite keeping yourself as you ought to do, you dream that *he* will not keep you. You know that he will never give you up, and yet you are almost ready to give it all up yourself, and say, "I shall prove an apostate after all." In this way little faith forgets her Lord. She is too bold one day, and too timid another, and all because she mixes up her confidences.

Little faith speaks unreasonably. Notice how our Lord puts it: "O

thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Faith is spiritual common sense; unbelief is unreasonable. For look; if Christ was worth trusting at all, and Peter had proved that he thought he was, by throwing himself into the sea, to come to him; then, if he was worth trusting at all, he was worthy to be trusted to the full. You cannot say of a man, "He is a faithful man, for you may at times rely upon his word." That qualifying word, "at times," is fatal to his character. Unless he is always to be relied upon, he is not an honest, truth-speaking man. And if you say of God's promises, "I can believe some of them, and therefore I expect him to help me under certain difficulties," you are accusing the Lord of unfaithfulness. O sir, you are cutting away the foundation of what little faith you have. Your Lord might ask you, "Why do you believe as much as you do believe? Having gone so far, why do you not go on to the end? The reason which makes you believe as much as you do believe, should make you believe to a still greater degree. O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? If thou hast any faith, why dost thou doubt? If any doubt, why any faith?" The two things are inconsistent with each other. You are not occupying a logical position in being a weak believer in a strong Christ. Why wavering faith in an unwavering promise? Why feeble faith in a mighty Saviour? Let your faith take its colour from him on whom it rests, and from the Word which you believe, and then you will be standing upon good, solid, reasonable ground, which can be justified to conscience and understanding.

One word more about our trembling apprehensions. *Weak faith often gets a wetting.* Although Peter was not drowned, yet you may be sure he was soaked to the skin with the water. If you have strong faith you will often escape a sea of troubles, which weak faith will be immersed in. Weak faith is a great fabricator of terrors. I know friends who have a trouble-factory in their back-garden, where they are always making rods for their own backs. They disbelieve God about this and about that, and hence they are always fretting and worrying, and getting wet through with trouble. I have heard say that home-made clothes very seldom fit; and, certainly, home-made troubles are very hard to bear. I have also heard that a home-made suit will last longer than other garments, and I believe that home-made troubles stick to us far longer than those which God appoints for us. Shut up that fear-factory, and make songs instead! If God send thee a trouble, it comes not amiss to thee. But who wetted Peter through and through, and soaked him in the deep? Who but Peter himself? Peter, afflicted Peter! If he had possessed strong faith, he might have had a dry coat. His Master prevented the waters destroying him; but he suffered them to make him very uncomfortable. If thou hast weak faith, thou wilt have broken joys and many discomforts.

Thus have I very gently censured weak faith. I did not mean to hurt a hair of its head. It is a blessed thing, this little faith—not its littleness, but its faith. If I could kill the weakness, and quicken the faith; if the littleness could be removed, and the faith could be increased, how glad should I be!

II. Now, LITTLE FAITH SHALL BE TENDERLY COMMENDED. I shall praise it, not because it is little, but because it is faith. Little faith requires to be tenderly handled, and then it will be seen to be a precious thing.

First of all, *it is true faith.* Faith which begins and ends with Jesus is true faith. The least faith in Jesus is the gift of God; and it is "like precious faith," though it is not like strong faith. If thou hast faith as a grain of mustard seed, thou canst do wonders. Though thy faith be so little that thou hast to look for it with all thine eyes, yet if it be there, it is of the same nature as the strongest faith. A three-penny piece is silver, as surely as the crown piece, and it bears the mint-mark quite as certainly. A drop of water is of the same nature as the sea; a spark is fire as assuredly as the flames of Vesuvius. Nobody knows what may come of a spark of faith: behold, it sets a thousand souls on fire! Little faith is true faith, for did not our Lord say to this Peter: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven"? Peter had true faith; and yet it was little faith. O my hearer, "If thou believest that Jesus is the Christ, thou art born of God." If thou dost feebly cast thyself on Christ's finished work, thy weakness in the act of reliance does not alter the fact that thou hast fallen into strong hands, which will surely save thee. Jesus saith, "Look unto me, and be ye saved"; and though thy look be a very unsteady one, and though tears of sorrow dim thine eyes so that thou canst not see him as he is, yet thy looking to him hath saved thee. Little faith is born from above, and belongs to the family of the saved. The weakest faith is real faith.

Next, notice that *little faith obeys the precept, and will not go a step without it.* Little faith cries, "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus." If Jesus saith, "Come," little faith answers, "Behold, I come!" Though her gait be staggering, and her knees be feeble, yet she will go where Jesus calls her, whether it be through flood or flame. I know some of the Lord's children who very seldom have much enjoyment; and yet I almost envy them for their tenderness of conscience. Their shrinking from the least contact with sin, their carefulness to keep the way of the Lord's commandments, are admirable traits in their character. Gracious walking is, after all, more precious than comfortable feeling. How can I blame thee, poor little faith, when I see thee afraid to put one foot before the other for fear thou shouldest step aside? I had rather see thee in all thy timidity thus carefully obedient than hear thee talking loudly about thy great faith, and then see thee tampering with sin and folly, and feeling as if when thou hast greatly erred it is a matter of no great consequence. When tenderness of conscience flourishes side by side with little faith, they are as two lilies for delicate beauty.

Peter's little faith did not try to walk upon water until Jesus gave the word of permission. Peter asked, "Bid me come." Oftentimes have I noticed men and women much despondent, greatly fearful, and yet they would not do anything for the life of them, until they heard

the voice behind them saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." They hesitate till they have consulted the map of the Word; they dare not go at a venture, but they kneel and cry for guidance, for they are afraid of taking even a single step apart from their Master's will. They have a holy dread of running without warrant from the Lord. Little faith, if this be thy mind and temper, we commend thee much!

And, next, *little faith struggles to come to Jesus.* Peter did not leave the ship for the mere sake of walking the waters; but he ventured on the wave that he might come to Jesus. He sought not a promenade upon the waves, but the presence and company of his Lord. "When Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus." That was the one point he aimed at—to get to Jesus. Some of you, I know, have but little faith; but you long to get nearer to Jesus. Your daily panting is, "Lord, reveal thyself to me, reveal thyself in me, and make me more like to thee." He who seeks Jesus has his face turned in the right direction. Though your knees knock together, and your hands hang down, yet what little headway you do make is towards Jesus: you strive to serve him, and to honour him; is it not so? Though the winds be contrary, you still pull for the shore. Well, though thou be little in faith, yet am I glad thou art struggling, despite thy feebleness, to reach thy Lord. Struggle on, for Jesus comes to meet thee; and when thou dost begin to sink, through mistrust, he will catch thee up and set thee on thy feet again. Wherefore, be of good cheer!

Little faith deserves commendation again, in that *it does behave grandly for a time.* Though Peter had little faith, yet he walked from one billow to another, in rare style. I think I see him after he had leapt out of the ship, astonished to find himself standing upon the waters, which lay beneath him like solid glass. Then he takes one step, like a child that begins to walk; and, with growing confidence, he takes another. Though the waves roll under his feet, yet he stands firmly upon them, for a time. Little faith can play the man for a while. When Jael took the nail and slew Sisera, the timorous woman became a warrior, as she slew the enemy of Israel. Many a time the lame and the feeble, who could not usually lift a hand in the holy war, have felt stimulated, and have developed heroism for the time being. Little faith, like David's sling, has slain the giant; like Ehud's left-handed dagger, little faith has wrought deliverance. So I commend thee, little faith; for thou hast thy high days and holidays, and thou too canst count thy victories, wrought in the name of Jesus. If it were always with thee as it is at times, thou wouldest be glorious indeed! Even now thou canst move mountains, and pluck up trees by the roots.

Little faith I must commend yet further; because *when it finds itself in trouble it betakes itself to prayer.* Peter begins to sink. What does Peter do? Peter prays: "Lord, save me." Little faith knows where her strength lies. When she is in trouble, she does not then turn her face to human confidences, or natural forces; but she turns immediately to prayer. Little faith pours out her heart before the Lord. I love to see a man, in the hour of his distress, begin to pray at once, as naturally as frightened birds take to their wings. Some of you run to your neighbours, or hold a council with your own wits: but the

profit of this course has never made you rich. Let us try a surer method. Instead of stopping to turn over all the old stock we have, let us go at once to Jesus for new help. Alas! we do not go to Jesus until we have knocked at every other door; and then the mercy is that he does not turn us away from his gate. Peter did not try the natural resort of swimming; he took to praying, "Lord, save me." O little faith, thou art great at pleading in prayer. Perhaps thy very weakness drives thee oftener to thy knees. Thou art not so prevalent in prayer as strong faith; but thou art quite as abundant in it. I see thee trembling and faint; then dost thou cry unto the Lord for strength, and he helps thee. This cry of thine proves thee to be of the spiritual stock; even as it was with one of old, of whom it was said, "Behold, he prayeth."

Weak faith has this commendation again, that *it is always safe, because Jesus is near.* Peter was safe on the water, because Christ was on the water. Though his faith was weak, he was not saved by the strength of his faith; he was saved by the strength of that gracious hand which was stretched out to catch him when he was sinking in the flood. If thou believest in Christ with all thy heart, if he is the first and last of thy confidence, then, though thou be full of trembling and alarm, Jesus will never let thee perish. If thou art depending upon him, and upon him alone, it is not possible that he should slight thy faith, and let thee die. God forbid we should so insult our Lord as to suppose he would let a believer drown, however weak his faith! Since Christ lives, how can we die? Since Christ standeth on the waters, how can we sink beneath them? Are we not one with him?

One thing I may say in commendation of weak faith, and that is, that *Jesus himself acknowledges that it is faith.* He said to Peter, "O thou of little faith." He rebuked him because it was little, but he smiled on him because it was faith. I love to feel that the Holy Ghost is the Creator, not of the littleness of our faith, but of our faith, be it ever so little. Our Lord acknowledges that to be faith which we suspect to be little better than unbelief. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," is an admirable prayer for many of us. Christ forgives the unbelief, but he very graciously accepts the faith, despite its weakness. He can spy out faith when, like a lone spark, it is all but smothered under a heap of rubbish.

Once more, I commend little faith because, though it may sometimes sink, *it recovers itself, and does its old wonders over again.* Peter is ready to sink; but when his Master has caught him, what do you see? There is not one person now walking on the water; there are two. Christ is there, and Peter too. Peter, my man, you walk on the sea as one to the manner born! Oh, yes; his little faith has learned, by a touch from the Lord, to do what it did at first: he walked the waves at first, and now he does it again. See! he comes up with his Lord into the ship. You that used to have good times, and at this hour look back upon them with deep regret, may have the like again. You that have grown despondent and sad, be of good courage; you shall have your festival days back again, and much brighter than they. "Oh, but I have wasted so much time," says one, "through this feeble faith of mine." Well, it is a great pity; but there is a promise which I

commend to your faith: "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." The locust has eaten up our harvests—this locust of weakness has devoured our pleasant fruits; yet our Lord Jesus Christ can restore to us those wasted years; he can pack ten years of usefulness into one; he can put seven days of joy into one day, and so make up to us the lost past. Our Lord can make you to forget the shame of your youth, and not to remember the reproach of your widowhood any more. Be of good courage, little faith! Thou comest of a good family, though thou be but a babe as yet. Be of good courage, little faith! Thou mayest be sick on board the vessel; but the vessel in which thou hast embarked is safe for all that, and thou wilt get to shore as surely as strong faith will do. Put thy trust in the Lord, and quietly wait for him, so shall thy morning surely come in due time. Thus have I gently censured and kindly commended little faith.

III. But now I want to say a few words to finish with; and this is the motto of them—GREAT FAITH IS MUCH MORE COMMENDED.

It is sometimes found where we least expected it. Our Lord beheld it, not in the manly Peter, but in the tender woman who pleaded for her child. She was a woman; but she had faith which put the men to shame. She was a Canaanitish woman, of a race concerning which it was said, "Cursed be Canaan," and yet she had stronger faith than Israelitish Peter, who had known the Scriptures from his youth up. She was a woman who had great discomfort at home; for the devil was there, tormenting her daughter. It is a dreadful thing to have the devil in your husband, or a devil in your daughter, when you go home; yet many a Christian woman has this to bear. Notwithstanding this grave trial, though there was nothing to comfort her at home, she was a woman of great faith. And why should not we be like her? My brother, although your condition and circumstances are greatly against your growth in grace, yet why should not you grow to manhood in Christ? The Lord Jesus can cause you to do so. Though it seems to you that you must be stunted by the chill blast and the cruel soil which environ you, yet the great husbandman can so foster you that you shall become a plant of renown. God can turn disadvantageous circumstances into means of growth. By the holy chemistry of his grace he can bring good out of evil. I commend great faith with special emphasis when I see it where all its surroundings are hostile to it.

Next, great faith is to be commended because *it perseveres in seeking the Lord.* This woman came to Jesus to have her daughter healed; and at first he answered her never a word. Oh, the misery of silent suspense! Next, he speaks coolly of her to his disciples; but she seeks on. She has come for a boon, and she so believes in the Lord, the Son of David, that she will not take "no" for an answer; she means to be heard, and so she presses her suit with importunity even to the end. Oh for a strong faith, a persevering faith! Brethren, have you got it? You men, are you using it? Here is a woman that had it, and kept it at work till she won her object. May we have it abundantly!

Great faith also *sees light in the thickest darkness.* I do not think Peter was half so tried as the Canaanite was. What was it that

frightened Peter? The wind. What might have frightened her? Why, the harsh words of Jesus himself. Who is afraid of the wind? Who would not be afraid of a rejecting Christ, speaking hard words? "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Why, if our Lord had spoken thus to any one of us, we should never have dared to pray again. We should have said, "No, that hard sentence shuts me out altogether." But not so strong faith. "No," says she, "he called me a dog. Dogs have a position in society; little dogs are carried by their little masters indoors at dinner time, that they may get a crust or a crumb; and, Lord, I will be a dog, and get my crumb: it is only a crumb for thee to give it, though it would be everything to me to get it." So she pleads with him as readily as if he had given her a promise instead of a rebuff. Great faith can see the sun at midnight: great faith can reap harvests at mid-winter, and find rivers in high places. Great faith is not dependent upon sunlight: she sees that which is invisible by other light. Great faith rests upon the certainty that such a thing is so because God has said it, and she is satisfied with his bare word. If she neither sees, nor hears, nor feels anything to corroborate the divine testimony, she believes God for his own sake, and all is well with her. O brethren, I hope you will be brought to this condition—that you will believe in God, though your feelings give God's promise the lie, and though your circumstances give it the lie. Though all your friends and companions give the Lord the lie, may you come to this, Let God be true with every man, and every man a liar; but doubt God we dare not, and we will not. His sure promise must stand. Such a faith as this deserves to be commended, and our Lord himself praises it. "O woman, great is thy faith"!

Great faith prays and prevails. How she did prevail! Her daughter was made whole, and she received a broad grant of whatever she willed. "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." I wish we had this mighty faith in connection with prayer. One man praying with faith will get more from God than ten men, or, for the matter of that, ten thousand men, who are unstable and unbelieving. Believe me, there is a way of praying in which you may have what you will of God. You may go up to your closet, and ask and have; ay, and come out of your solitude saying, "I have it." Even though you have it not as a matter of actual enjoyment, yet your faith has grasped it, realized it, and believed in it, and so has taken immediate possession. Did not Luther often, in his worst times, come down from his chamber crying, "Vici," "I have conquered"? He wrestled with God in prayer, and then he felt that all else that he had to wrestle with was just nothing: if he had overcome heaven by prayer, he could overcome earth, and death, and hell. Strong faith doth all this, and goes on to do more.

She has extraordinary reverence for God; but she has a wonderful familiarity with him. If you were to hear what strong faith has sometimes dared to say to God, you would think it profane; and profane it would be from any lips but hers. But when God indulges her to know the secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear him, and when he says, "Ask what thou wilt, and it shall be done unto thee," she has a blessed liberty with God, which is to be commended, and not

forbidden. If the Son make you free in prayer, you shall be free indeed. Strong faith is ever on the winning side. It wears the keys of heaven at its girdle. The Lord can deny nothing to the pleadings of an unstaggering faith.

I commend strong faith, because *Jesus, our Lord, was delighted with it.* What music there was in his words, "O woman, great is thy faith"! There was no smile on his face when he said to Peter, "O thou of little faith": it grieved him that his follower should have such little faith in him. But now it gladdened him that this poor woman had such splendid faith. He looks at her faith as jewellers do at some famous stone worth more than they can tell. "O woman," said he, "great is thy faith. I am charmed with thy faith. I am amazed at thy faith. I am delighted with thy faith." Well, brethren, you and I long to do something to please our Redeemer. I know we have often cried, "Oh, what shall I do my Saviour to praise?" Believe him then. Believe his promise without doubt. Believe him greatly. Believe him unstaggeringly. Believe him to the full, and go on in faith till there seems to be nothing further to believe. Believe evermore in Christ Jesus.

How enriched that woman became! She had pleased her Lord, and then her Lord pleased her: "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." She went away the happiest woman under the skies. God had given her her desire, and she was over-glad and ever glad.

What benefits we could confer upon others if we had strong faith! Her daughter was made whole. Mother, if thou hadst more faith, thy child would soon be brought to Jesus. Father, if thou hadst more faith, thy boy would not be such a plague to thee as he now is. Have more faith in thy God; and when thou dost treat thy Father better, thy children shall treat thee better. If thou wilt dishonour thy God by doubting him, do you wonder your children dishonour you by disobeying you? O preacher, if thou hadst more faith, thou wouldest have more converts! Sunday-school teacher, if thou hadst more faith, more children would be brought to the Saviour out of thy class. "Lord, increase our faith"! I hope we are all saying that in our hearts at this moment.

I will conclude by asking: Is there not great reason why our faith in Christ should be strong? Is there not every reason why we should have the strongest faith in him? I told you, the other day, of John Hyatt, when he was dying. Someone said to him: "Mr. Hyatt, can you trust your soul with Christ now?" He said, "I would trust him with ten thousand souls, if I had them." We can go even further than that. If all the sins that men had committed since the world was made, and time began, were laid upon one poor sinner's head, that sinner would be justified in believing that Christ could take that sin away. Whosoever thou art, and whatever thou art, bring your burdens, and lay them at his feet, casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you; and henceforth may he never have to say to you, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Oh, may he often exclaim, with joy, of you, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt"! May the Holy Spirit bless these simple words of mine to your edification! Amen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FEVER, AND ITS CURE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 23RD, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, September 11th, 1890.

"And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them."—Luke iv. 38, 39.

PETER was of Bethsaida; but yet he had a house at Capernaum. Is it not highly probable that he had moved there to be near our Lord's headquarters, to hear everything that he said, to see all his miracles, and to yield him constant attendance and service? I think it was so. This is what we should expect from the Lord's true-hearted followers; and I am sad when I remember how many professed disciples of Jesus nowadays act on another principle. When they are removing they do not consider whether they shall be near the house of prayer or the place of usefulness. Though their souls have been fed, and they have declared intense love to the church and the pastor, they nevertheless go away with a light heart to places where there are no means of grace. Should these things be so? In choosing our residence, we should have large respect to its relation to our soul's work and welfare. We should ask, "Shall we be where we can honour our Lord?"

In his house, Simon willingly entertained his wife's mother, which is presumptive evidence that he was a good man, willing out of love to run risk of discomfort. We have evidence that his wife's mother was a good woman; for the moment that she was healed, she arose and ministered unto them; whereas, in too many cases, an invalid and aged person would demand to be waited upon. She was a blessing to any house, for she evidently lent all the strength she had to the work of the family. I know just such women, whose very life is to minister to others. Happy Peter to have such a mother-in-law! Happy mother-in-law to have such a son!

Good as the tenants were, sickness came to the house. Capernaum was situated, like several other towns, in that low, marshy district which surrounds the northern part of the sea of Galilee, near the spot where the Jordan runs into it. There was always a great deal of ague about; and that ague, putting on its very worst form, had come to Peter's house as "a great fever," and had laid low his excellent mother-in-law, much to the grief of all. However dear you may be to the heart of God, and however near you live to him, you will be liable to sorrow. "Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." None of us can hope for entire exemption from affliction: I am not sure that we should wish for it.

But then, it so happened—and it so happens always—that just when the trial came, Jesus came too. It is very beautiful to see the Lord of life close on the track of the fever, ready to deliver his chosen one. When a great affliction comes to a house, a great blessing is coming too. As our tribulations abound, so do our consolations. I have often noticed that when we are exceeding glad, some ill news will hurry up to calm our excitement. It has happened so to me this very week: returning from a happy meeting, a telegram met me to announce a sorrowful bereavement. On the other hand, when we are exceeding sorrowful, the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, causes a sense of peace and rest to steal over us, and sustain us. How often have I found the divine presence more consciously revealed, and more sweetly sustaining in the hour of trouble than at any other season! I would not invite the fever to my house; but if Jesus would come with it, I would not be alarmed at its approach. If we do see our Lord riding on the pale horse, we will welcome the horse for the sake of its rider. Come, Lord Jesus, come how thou wilt; but suffer not the trial to come alone!

When Jesus came, they told him of her. Make a practice of telling the Lord about all your family concerns. Bring sicknesses and other troubles to your best friend. Do it at family prayer, but do it also at your bedside alone. If Jesus has come to stay with you, he will not hold himself aloof from your anxieties. He comes with his great sympathetic heart to be afflicted in your afflictions. Keep no secret from him, since he keeps none from you; for, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." So Peter and the rest told Jesus of the good woman who was bedridden with fever, and at once the Lord Jesus went into the room, and brought his divine power to bear upon the disease, that she might be at once restored. He stood over her; he rebuked the fever; he took her by the hand and lifted her up, and in a moment the fever was gone, and she was not only well, but strong.

You have heard this incident preached from before, but not in the way in which I shall use it. It is a very singular thing that, as far as I know, in the whole range of homiletics there is not one in which this cure of the fever is treated as the other healing miracles have been. The other miraculous cures have been legitimately regarded by preachers of the Word as types of the removal of certain forms of sin. When we preach about the leper, we talk to you concerning great sin, and grievous defilement. When we consider the story of

Lazarus, who had been dead, we perceive that every point of his resurrection bristles with spiritual teaching. If it is so in other miracles, why not in this? Why is one miracle to be looked upon as instructive as to spiritual and moral truth, and another be left unused? I shall use this miracle of the healing of the fevered one for ourselves, since it may be that some of us are mentally or spiritually sick of a fever. There is a fever of soul, which comes even upon gracious people, which only Christ can heal. Oh, that he may heal us now!

Here will be the run of my discourse. First, *spiritual fevers are common;* secondly, *they arise from several causes;* thirdly, *these are mischievous in their action;* and fourthly, *there is One who can cure these fevers.* Oh, that I may be helped so to speak of this spiritual disease at this time, that while you hear my voice, you may also feel my Master's touch, and go your way restored from your fever!

I. Let me, first, remind you, that SPIRITUAL FEVERS ARE VERY COMMON. *A fever begins with a kind of restlessness.* The patient cannot be quiet, nor be at ease in any position. He is not pleased with anything for more than a moment. He cannot help it; he is tossed to and fro, and is like the troubled sea. He suspects everybody, and has confidence in nothing. Are there not many who are in that condition with regard to spiritual things? Their religion is a question, rather than a doctrine; an experiment, and not an experience. Their own interest in Christ is a grave anxiety, rather than an assured delight. They believe the promise, but cannot grasp it for themselves, so as to feel sure and happy. A sermon full of good cheer does not afford them a cup of comfort. They are so feverish that they settle to nothing. No promise, no truth, no heavenly gift, can yield them repose: they are tossed up and down like the locust.

This restlessness affects them with regard to temporal things too: they are always anxious, doubtful, timorous. There is that excellent woman Martha. She is here to-night, but she has had a task to tear herself away from the washing and mending; and while she has been sitting here she has been wondering all the while whether she put the guard before the fire when she came out. She has felt three or four times in her pocket for her keys. She is half afraid that an accident will happen to the baby before she gets back. She is anxious about everything she can think of, and anxious about some things she has not thought of. Will her husband be home before she gets back? How will he be? Will he like his supper? Will the children all be well to-morrow? Evidently she has the domestic fever upon her, and rest is out of the question. She must worry and fidget: there is no consoling her. I know what it is as a minister to feel very feverish about the characters and proceedings of the members of the church. I have been told that farmers are very liable to the weather-fever. It is either too wet or too dry. There may be good times for the root-crops; but then, it is bad for the corn. Merchants have the speculative fever, and workmen the strike fever. Some of you tradesfolk are wonderfully feverish in reference to your shop and your stock-taking. Will you, after all, have a good season, and make a fair profit? When a man falls into that state, although we do not call in a doctor, there is great need to call in the heavenly Physician. A Christian in good,

sound, spiritual health, is calm, quiet, peaceful, happy, full of repose, for he is obedient to that sweet verse of the psalm, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." This restlessness is a sign of the times, but it is a great pity that it should afflict the people of God.

Some folks with this fever are troubled with the *burning heat of irritability*. They take offence where none is intended. You cannot put your words in the right order to satisfy them. Members of churches who get into this irritable state are always imagining that they have enemies all around them: everybody has not been quite respectful to their royal highnesses; they treasure up little slights, and feel highly indignant. I know more people with this fever than I should like to mention. It is a happy thing to live with a brother who is spiritually and mentally sound; for then you may speak freely, and you need not be afraid of being misunderstood; but feverish folk make you an offender for a word, or a look. They are grieved because you did not see them, or did see them: either way you are wrong. One feels that he is like a man walking among eggs: he has to be careful, even to a painful degree. Let us be gentle with the irritable brother. He cannot help it, poor man! It is not the man so much as it is the fever that is on him.

The influence of fever is seen in other ways. It is *intermittent*, and makes the patient *change from hot to cold*. Feverish persons love a religion of excitement. They are eager and impatient, omit repentance, and leap into a false security. Their zeal is not according to knowledge; and so it is fierce as the blaze of thorns under a pot, and it dies out as soon. What haste they make! Everything must be done immediately; the patient waiting of faith is too slow for them. They are determined to drive the church before them, and drag the world after them; but to plod on in Scriptural ways they cannot endure. We like to see the healthy heat of earnestness; but theirs is the burning heat of passion. This fever heat soon turns to a chill; and they shiver with dislike of the very thing they cried up so loudly. They are as cold as they were hot; and again they turn to be as hot as they were cold. A strange fever is upon them, and you know not where to find them. The steady warmth of vital principle, intelligent faith, true love to Christ, and zeal for the conversion of souls, has little in common with the fever of fanaticism. May God grant that we may always have the warmth of healthy life, but may we be saved from being delirious one day and lethargic the next! Religious inflammation is the dangerous counterfeit of holy zeal. Be as hot as you will; but do not turn cold directly, or else we shall tremble for you.

A worse kind of fever, perhaps, is that which shows itself in *thirst* of different kinds. Some suffer from the yellow fever of avarice: they thirst for gold-water, and the more they drink the more the thirst consumes them. They rise up early, they sit up late, they eat the bread of carefulness, and all they long for is to gain and hoard; but the love of Jesus is not near their hearts. They are all hack and hurry, toil and turmoil, woe and worry. The deadly yellow fever is upon them—they must lay up much goods for many years, and add field to field till they are left alone in the earth. God save his people from even a touch of this fever!

Some are smitten with the scarlet fever of ambition. They must be everybody. Some would be great, greater, greatest, and then greater still, always sighing for the pre-eminence, like Diotrephes. Ambition, kept in due check, may be right enough; but when it rises to fever heat, it is a great sin. The man does not enjoy what he has because he is lusting for more; and meanwhile he treads down his brethren and becomes high-minded, and unkind. While anyone is still a little higher than himself, he is envious and malicious. May the Lord cure us of these fevers, if we have even the smallest trace of them!

Alas, alas! I have to mention one other fever, which is a kind of gastric fever, *a fever of the stomach!* It comes to men who have degraded themselves below the brutes by intoxication. When they seek to abstain and quit the cup, a drink-fever hinders them. Some imagine that it is an easy thing to escape from drunkenness; but it is not so. Those who are now true children of God have given us an awful description of the hankering which came upon them months after they had given up the drink. Often it seemed to them nothing but a miracle that they kept clear of the temptation: they felt as if they must drink or die. O dear friends, have great pity upon the drunkard in his struggle to escape. Help him all you can by words of encouragement, and especially by the grand encouragement of your own example; for, believe me, it is a horrible fever, and happy is he who has never felt it. If any of you have it upon you, look to almighty grace for deliverance; for if you look to anything short of this, I fear you will go back to your sin.

Yet one more fever I would mention. There is one which I may well call *brain-fever*—a very common disease nowadays. Persons cannot be satisfied with the old doctrines of the gospel; they must have something new. They do not know that in theology nothing new is true, and nothing true is new. God has given us a faith which he once for all delivered unto the saints, with no intent that it should ever be changed. Do you think that revelation is imperfect, and that we are to improve upon it? After all, then, it is not God's revelation that we are to believe, but our own deductions therefrom, and our own improvements thereupon. God forbid that we should fall under such a delusion! Very many young men—and I dare say young women, too, though I do not so often meet with them—have begun to feel that they must *think;* which, also, we should be glad for them to do. But they dream that they must think their own thoughts, and they will not submit their thoughts to the instruction of the Spirit of God. This is a vain thought. They claim that they may think as they please; and so it comes to pass that their thoughts are not God's thoughts. They diverge more and more from the eternal truth of God, till they wander among the dark mountains of error, and perish in utter infidelity. God keep us from this. If this fever is upon any one of you, may the cooling hand of the Holy Spirit, and the sobering influence of a divine experience, bring you back to spiritual and mental health again. These fevers are as common as they are fatal. If you, dear hearer, have not suffered from them, many others have done so, and we are anxious for their cure; therefore, we would bring them to Jesus. who can rebuke the fever, and heal the sick ones.

II. Secondly, THESE FEVERS ARISE FROM MANY CAUSES.

Peter's wife's mother may have been smitten with fever through the undrained and boggy spots around the sea of Galilee, especially where the Jordan makes a marsh. *She dwelt in a low spot*, where the air was full of malaria, and the fever pounced upon her. Ah, Christian people! if you live below your privileges, if you live in the marsh-land of worldliness, if prayer is neglected, if the Bible is not read, if the great truths of the gospel do not fill your meditations, if you sojourn much among ungodly folk, and make them your companions, you are living in a low situation, where you will get one or other of these fevers before long. If you climb the mountains of confidence in God, and dwell near to God, and rest your souls upon him, the fever will soon vanish; but if you continue in the hollows of unbelief, and the damp places of worldliness, you will grow more and more anxious and restless, and will thirst for evil things. You who dwell in the misty lowlands doubt your own love to Jesus. If you climbed the hills of joy, and dwelt on the heights of fellowship, you would know your love to God, and find it daily growing. The sunlight of his countenance is a sure cure for the fever of anxiety. Abide with him, and the heat of anxiety will depart, and your irritability will disappear, and you will be calm and joyful.

A second great cause of spiritual fever is *allowing things to stagnate*. The moment the sanitary authorities cut drains, and let the waters run out of the land, and carry away the filth, the fever begins to abate. Stagnant water breeds miasma, and fever is sure to come. When the waters are no longer putrid, but have free course, then the source of fever is taken away. How many people get into a feverish state through having everything stagnant! You do not teach in the Sunday-school: your teaching power is stagnant. You never go out to the village station to preach: your talking power is stagnant. You have nobody to pray for: your intercessory power is stagnant. Everything about you is still and stale. You have nothing to live for, nothing to do; and therefore your whole being is shut up within itself, and this breeds mischief. The Lord help you to cut a good wide drain, and let your life run out to some useful purpose, instead of hoarding it up by selfishness. Spiritual fever soon disappears before holy, unselfish activity.

Fevers, again, come on through excessive heat. In countries where the temperature rises high, fever is more common and fatal than with us. The white man dies, and even the black man finds it hard to live in parts of Africa. I fear that life in London is growing very much like the tropical regions. Our forefathers took things rather more coolly than we do. In Cromwell's time, a writer tells us that he walked all down Cheapside in the early morning, and found all the blinds down, because at every house they were having family prayer. Where will you go to find such a state of things in this burning age? You are up in the morning, and at it; and all day long you are at it, and at it, and at it. Little rest is given to our minds; and yet we want holy rest. We need to sit at Jesus' feet with Mary, and because we do not do so, the burden and heat of the day are telling upon our spiritual constitutions, and we are not strong as we need to be.

But, worst of all, *fever is often born of filth.* I suppose that even excessive heat would not produce it if it were not for decaying matter which, in rotting, gives out evil vapours and deadly gases. There is nothing more putrid in the natural world than sin is in the moral world. Flee from sin as you would from a reeking dunghill of rottenness. I charge you, children of God, be clean in yourselves and your surroundings. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." It is hard to avoid contact with evil in these days; but yet we must aim at it. Our public walls disgust us with indecencies of the most staring kind: they make us blush for the times. We can, however, keep ourselves from the resorts of the frivolous, the vicious, and the drunken; and I beseech you, as you love the Lord, and as you desire to be healthy in his sight, stand not in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scorners. Run not with the multitude to do evil. Come ye out from among them: be ye separate: touch not the unclean thing, for then God will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be his sons and daughters. The corruption which reeks around us has the dread tendency to breed fevers in our minds of the most perilous kind: we must, therefore, use our utmost endeavours to keep ourselves disinfected by the grace of God.

Fever also comes of overcrowding. Where people are closely packed together in their sleeping places, breathing exhausted air, there disease lurks as in its chosen lair. I am afraid that we most of us get too crowded by fellowship with men; conversing with them from morning to night, working with them, dealing with them in business; and thus learning their ways and catching their spirit. Oh, to get into the purer atmosphere of heaven, and to be alone with God! In the spiritual realm we find space and air enough for a soul to breathe freely. Where God manifests himself to us, we are refreshed with breezes from the eternal hills. Why are we wearied with man's talk, or with women's chat, when converse with God would revive our spirits? Oh, to be quit of men, and quiet with God! Amid this crowd we find our souls suffocating; but when we are on the mount of God we breathe freely and feel revived.

Not to leave out any one thing which may instruct us, I would remind you that *fevers are often caused by poor diet.* Persons have not enough to eat, and the fever germs fructify in their weakness. With many Christians the rule seems to be one spiritual meal a week. Sunday morning is the occasion for baiting the religious horse. Your very respectable Christian person goes out to worship on Sunday morning; but at no other time. What does he do on Sunday afternoon? This deponent sayeth not. What does he do on Sunday evening? He is at home taking his ease. At a prayer-meeting, some time ago, one brother prayed that the Lord would bless those who were at home "on beds of sickness *and on sofas of well-ness.*" The last words were unexpected, but very needful. Certain of our friends practise the art of tarrying at home; but I fear they do not divide the spoil. As to prayer-meetings, and week-night lectures, these are regarded rather as tasks than privileges by many professors. They live on one meal a week. Would any of you, who are doing this, oblige me with a trial of this regimen in reference to your bodies? Will you only eat on a Sunday morning? You shall take what you please at that one meal,

and consume as much as you can of it; but you must have only that one meal till next week. Do you decline the experiment? I think you are wise. I should not expect to see you here often to report your experience. I feel sure you would break through the regulation before it had reached its full result. Therefore, I pray you, do not carry out the experiment of spiritual starvation, lest you die in the operation. This neglect of heavenly food brings many Christians into so low a state that spiritual fever readily fastens upon them. Alas! many have poor spiritual diet. Spiritual meals nowadays, when they are taken, do not amount to much. In many a place where Christ was preached by the good old man, who is now in heaven, you will find that anything else is held forth except the Lord Jesus. Your cultured gentleman sickens at the idea of preaching about the precious blood. He calls the cardinal doctrine of the atonement "the theology of the shambles." Shame on his profane tongue! He is ashamed to speak of original sin, or the new birth, or to tell men that if they are not saved, they will be cast into hell. He is too refined to speak plain truth. You may eat a thousand meals of his sort of meat before you will know that you have had a mouthful; for it is all light as air, and unsubstantial as froth. Such wind can never satisfy a hungering soul; but it can starve it down so low that disease preys upon it.

Some become fevered, not so much by what they do themselves, as by being in *contact with others who are full of the disease;* for it is exceedingly contagious. I can bear witness to that. It has been my lot to deal with the fevers of doubt, depression, anxiety, and despair, and it is hard to deal with these without catching them. I remember that one day I saw several mournful cases of depression. I will not say that the patients ought to have been in an asylum; but I am sure that many in those places are as reasonable as those I conversed with. They were sadly doubting, fearing, trembling, and dreading; and it was no light work to treat their unhappy cases. I tried to comfort them, and I hope that I succeeded in a measure; but by the time that I had borne the burdens of a half dozen of them, I needed comfort myself. It is not easy to lift others up without finding yourself exhausted. I went over all the gospel arguments for salvation by faith, and I heard their objections, and pressed the truth upon them, and when they went away smiling, I stayed behind to pray God to make the work effectual, and also to lift up the light of his countenance upon *me;* for I needed to be filled again after pouring out my soul for others.

The fever of depression may be caught while we are acting as surgeons to other fevered ones. If you live with a friend who is always playing on the minor key, you will find your own music growing mournful. If you have companions in life who are nervous, fretful, fearful, melancholy—or, what is worse, full of doubts of God—you will be likely to be warped as they are, and you will soon feel that the sunlight has gone out of your life. What must you do? Run away from these sorrowful ones? By no means. But you must seek more grace, that, instead of being dragged down by them, you may draw them upward to God and brighter things. Be filled with spiritual life, and then you will survive your contact with the feeble and

diseased. I could not help mentioning this; for to me it is a frequent cause of fever, and I would that I could rise far above it.

III. Thirdly, and as briefly as I can, THIS FEVER, IN ANY OF ITS FORMS, IS MISCHIEVOUS. What does it do? Well, fever *puts you altogether out of order*. You cannot precisely say where a fever begins or ends, or in what organ it operates most powerfully; for it puts the whole system out of gear. Nothing is right. You feel as if you could not sit, or lie, or be quiet in any position. You cannot do anything, and yet you must be doing. Now, when a soul gets into the fever of unbelief, and fear, and anxiety, it is in general disorder. The prayer is fevered; the song languishes; the patience fails; the service drags. The mind is like a harp whose strings are out of tune. It is a mischievous thing, this fever—mischievous to every faculty.

And then *it brings pain and misery*. In the commencement of a fever, pain is usually felt in the joints and other parts of the body. If I am fearful and anxious, I am in mental pain. If I am doubting and dreading, I am in pain. If I am fretty, irritable, petulant, murmuring, I must have pain; and hence it is an evil thing to be overtaken by a spiritual fever.

Mental fever *takes away his beauty* from the Christian. A man who has a fever has his features pinched and drawn. A practised doctor can tell when a patient has the fever by the very look of his face. Looking at his eyes, and other features, he says, "This man has a typhoid upon him. I am sure of it." Are there not some Christians who do not look as they used to look? for they are ill-humoured, or timid, or fretful, or hasty, and all through the inward fever. Their voice has lost the joyful note it used to have, and their whole deportment is dreary. The hallelujahs have gone; the hosannahs have died out. The Lord would have his people beautiful and gladsome. He made them that they might show forth his praise. It is no small evil when the heat of spiritual fever dries up the moisture of our graces, and turns our comeliness into corruption.

This mental heat brings with it *languor and weakness*. The man is a Christian, but he is not much of a Christian. He lives, but he does not grow, nor exhibit strength. What a difference there is between the able-bodied worker and the invalid! Here is a railway cutting to be made through a hill, and we need a number of working men to do it. They tell me that we can get a hundred men at once if we apply to the Hospital for Consumptives. But we do not see the wisdom of the advice. Poor fellows, what a misery it would be to see them doing their little best with pain and labour! I had rather not be the leader of such a band. Give me a company of stout English navvies, with bone and muscle. Why, the mountain flies before their spades like the waters before the blast of the north wind. The road is cut through the mountain, and the men are gone to perform like wonders elsewhere. We want, in these days, Christian men with stamina in them. What work healthy souls will do! But when they catch fever in their souls, what painful and futile efforts they make!

Dear friends, it is to be feared that *those who give way to fever may drift into delirium* by-and-by; for fevers often lead to that. My good friend who begins complaining just a little, does not know that he will

grow to be one of the most obstinate grumblers in the world. My good sister yonder, who is only a little nervous and fretty, does not know into what an abyss of unbelief she will yet plunge. If you say one word against God, there is no reason why you should not say two; and if you say two, the devil will soon teach you to say twenty, till at last you rave at the Lord God. Oh, that we could be silent before him, in holy calm and peace! We should then escape that delirium of rebellious dread into which so many are hurried.

If by God's grace we are delivered from this fever, *it may leave behind it sad remains.* Any doctor will tell you that fevers are not only to be dreaded for what they are, but for what they leave behind them. When a man is cured of fever, he may yet be injured for the rest of his life; and if you and I do not keep quiet before God, and calm and happy, but begin to get anxious, and wilful, and avaricious, and ambitious, we may hurt ourselves seriously for all time; and, it may be, even on our death-bed we shall look back with sorrow to that day of unbelief when we grieved the Lord and lost his presence. The Lord keep us from these fevers in every degree!

I must also remind you of one thing more, beloved: *this disease*, as I have said, *is catching.* I brought this fact forward under our second head, but I must mention it yet again. If some of you could fret, and trouble, and worry yourselves, and did not at the same time injure others, it might not so much matter; but the sad fact is, there are some Christians who drag others down into their own wretchedness. You spoil the joys of the saints. They are willing to comfort you, but you ought not to be so ready to cause them disquietude. Some of you are enough to give the fever of despondency to a whole parish. God's ministers are willing to comfort you; but they ought not to be called upon to spend so much time in entering into your case. It is a dreadful waste of time and thought—this looking after the fevered ones. When an army has to carry half its number in ambulances, it takes well-nigh the other half to carry them, and no fighting can be done. The cruelties of war are great; but I am told that the aim is now to be, not to kill the opposite party, but to wound them. If you kill a man, he counts one as a loss to the other side; but if you wound a man, and another man is called out to look after him, that counts as a loss of two from the fight. This is the sort of craft whereby Satan injures the host of God. He does not kill off some of you by leading you into gross sin, but he wounds you, so that you need more than one to look after you; and thus the strength of the army of salvation is greatly diminished. I ought to be spending my strength in winning souls, instead of which I have to look after you who have the fever. I am content to be a nurse, but I had rather be winning souls.

IV. Lastly, THERE IS ONE WHO CAN CURE THE FEVER. I am afraid that I have given rather a sad description, and I am sorry that some of you have been obliged to say, "However sad, it is true of us." But observe, dear friends, the cure, which is not wrought by medicine, or surgery, or any profound system of the doctors. The cure lies here. The poor patient lies flat in her bed. We read, "She was laid, and sick of a fever." She could not therefore sit up, much less rise from the bed. When she opened her eyes, and looked up, she saw the Lord

Jesus Christ *standing over her*. O fevered soul! open thine eyes to-night, and see Jesus standing over thee. With tender love and infinite compassion he looks down upon thee; he shields thee, thinks of thee, and watches over thee for good. He will help thee; therefore, fear not. Over thee to-night he broods, as doth an eagle over its young. Jehovah-Jesus bows over thee with fulness of love and power. In thy present trouble, fear, and depression of spirit, Jesus stands over thee, and his eye and his heart are upon thee.

Then, next, to her great surprise, *the Lord touched her*. Dear Master, touch the fevered ones to-night. Oh, to feel that he is a real man like yourself, your brother, very near to you! This is the touch which will drive out the fever. I love the old verse—

> "A man there was, a real man,
> Who once on Calvary died;
> That same dear man exalted sits
> High at his Father's side."

The Lord Jesus is a real man, and so he touches you in your feeble and suffering nature, and he seems to say, "In all your afflictions I am afflicted." When saints are in the furnace, one like unto the Son of God is there with them. They are sufferers, but he is "the Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." The Lord give you to feel the touch of the true humanity of Christ!

We read that, when our Lord had touched her, *he rebuked the fever*. Your feverishness deserves his rebuke. Oh, that he would bid it begone! Oh, that he would say to-night, "Begone unbelief! Begone anxiety! Begone fretfulness! Begone doubt and fear"! The winds and the waves heard his rebuke, and from their noise and clamour they hushed themselves to a great calm. Oh, that Jesus would come now, and speak to your feverishness, and you shall be as happy as the birds of paradise. I had a great trouble last night: I will not tell you what it was—a great trouble to my heart; but this morning I had a great joy, which I will tell to you. It is this note: "Dear Sir,—I feel so happy to tell you that the Lord has pardoned a poor outcast of society. I got into your place in a crowd, hoping nobody would see me. I had been out all night, and was miserable. While you were preaching about the leper,* my whole life of sin rose up before me. I saw myself worse than the leper; cast away by everybody. There is not a sin I was not guilty of. *As you went on I looked straight away to Jesus*. A gracious answer came, 'Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven.' I never heard any more of your sermon. I felt such joy to think that Jesus died even for a poor harlot. Long ere you get this letter I trust to be on the way to my dear home I ran away from. Do please pray for me, that I may be kept by God's almighty power. I can never thank you enough for bringing me to Jesus"—and so on. If it had not been for that bit about going home, I might have had some doubt about it; but when a fallen girl goes home to her father and mother, it is a safe case. This gives me joy: do you wonder? To see souls saved is heaven to me. I find that my

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* See Spurgeon's Sermons, No. 2,162. "And why not me?"

Lord has a gracious way of laying on a plaster where he makes a sore. If the heart be heavy with grief, he can balance it with consolation.

The next thing Jesus did was to raise her up. You must have felt, when lying very ill, as if you were buried in the bed. So the Saviour gave his hand to her, and *he lifted her up*. She did not think that she could rise, but with his aid she sat up. Then he gave her an instant cure, and at the same time renewed her strength. No trace of fever remained. She was perfectly well. Her instinct, as a matronly woman and head of the household, was to rise at once to prepare a meal for her Benefactor and his disciples. Oh, that you doubting ones, you fevered ones, might at once be cured and lifted up, so that you would immediately set about serving the Lord, and ministering to those around you! Come, let us be as happy as ever we can be, and as useful as it lies in our power to be, and may the fever never visit any one of us again! On the contrary, as you go home, trip over the pavements with a sense of spiritual health; and when you get home, say at once, "I must minister unto Jesus. He has driven out my cares and fears, and soothed my mind, and therefore out of love I will spend and be spent to his praise." God bless you, for the Saviour's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxxvii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—708, 37 (Song II.), 746.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—By God's goodness, though compassed with infirmity, I have preached right on through the year, although I have felt gradually growing feeble. During the last week of the term I was obliged to keep my bed: the body was in pain, and the mind would not work. It was a general running down of all my powers.

So I left home thoroughly exhausted. The journey to this delightful haven is a long one; but sitting here in the warm, clear sunlight, I feel that I am none the worse for the thousand miles of travelling. The change in climate is almost beyond belief. A few days in such air as this will set me up. What a change from being steamed to death in the almost solid fogs of London! Thanks be unto God for such a place of recovery for those who are spent in service! I would get out of it all the benefit I can, that my ministry may show vigour of mind and power of divine grace.

Bright upon the tablet of my heart is the record of what was done by Tabernacle friends on Friday, November 7; when the people willingly offered of their substance unto the Lord, and all that was needed for the repair of the house of our assembly was brought in at one stroke. A thousand times do I thank all those generous givers. Outside friends have also sent in grand amounts to provide for the other funds, and thus the Lord has put his servant beyond care for the needs of the work at this present.

I write because continually requested to do so, and to assure you of my love in Christ Jesus.

Yours truly,

Menton, November 15, 1890. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"SO IT IS."

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 30TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, October 12th, 1890.

"Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good."—Job v. 27.

THUS closed a forcible speech by Eliphaz the Temanite: it may be called his "summing up." He virtually says, "What I have testified in the name of my friends is no dream of theirs. Upon this matter we are specialists; and bear witness to truth which we have made the subject of research and experience. Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good." By this declaration he sets forth his teaching with authority, and presses it home. He persuades Job to consider what he had said, for it was no hasty opinion, but the ripe fruit of experience. When we speak what we know we expect to be heard.

I shall not follow Eliphaz: I am only going to borrow his closing words, and use them in reference to gospel testimony; which is to us a thing known and searched out. I shall use it in the following way. First, our text sets forth *the qualification of the teacher.* He must be a man who can say, "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is."

Secondly, we have *the argument with the hearers;*—"We have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good." And lastly, we have here *the exhortation for every enquirer* who wants to know the truth concerning spiritual and eternal things: "Hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

I. To begin with, I judge that these words may well describe THE QUALIFICATION OF THE TEACHER. He will be poorly furnished if he cannot run in the line which Eliphaz draws in the words of our text.

He should have, first, an intimate knowledge of his subject. How can he teach what he does not know? When we come to talk about God, and the soul, and sin, and the precious blood of Jesus, and the new birth, and holiness and eternal life, the speaker who knows nothing about these things personally must be a poor driveller. Let

him be quiet till he knows what he is to speak upon. Let him sweep chimneys, or cobble shoes, or break stones, or follow any other honourable calling, but it will not be honest for him to profess to be a preacher of the gospel unless he is acquainted with these sacred subjects. I know well the place of the ministry of one who was ordained to be a preacher, and drew the hire of which every true labourer is worthy. He delivered a discourse which greatly troubled the mind of a friend named Jonathan, whom I knew and esteemed. The awakened young man went to him on the Monday, and said, "Oh, sir, your sermon last Sabbath-day has robbed me of my sleep, and made me very anxious." The preacher answered, "I am very sorry for it, Jonathan. I will never preach that sermon any more. If it troubles people, I will have no more of it; for I have something better to do than to make people miserable." "But, sir," said the young man, "you preached about the new birth, and you said we must be born again. In fact your text said so. What does it mean?" He answered, "Jonathan, I do not know anything about it; but you are such a good fellow that I am quite sure you need not be afraid. If there is anything in being born again you had it when you were christened. In your baptism, you were made a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. That is all I know about it." It is needful that we say to some preachers, first of all—YE must be born again, for, if not, you cannot interpret the new birth to the people. Without personal experience you will speak riddles of which you do not know the answers. The blind will lead the blind, and both will fall into the ditch. There is a German story of a minister who had delivered himself very earnestly upon a vital theme, and after the service he was waited upon by one in great distress of heart, who was peculiar in his use of language. He generally said "we" when he should have said "I"; and so he said to the minister, "Sir, if what you have been saying is true, *what shall we do?*" He did not mean to bring the minister into it, but the use of the word "we" implicated the pastor so much that he began to search, and, searching, he found that he had no part nor lot in the matter, and that he had been preaching what he himself had never felt. Have I anybody here who is doing this every Sabbath-day? A blind man, who is teaching others about colour and vision? A preacher of an unknown God? A dead man sent with messages of life? You are in a strange position, dear friend. The Lord save you! I wish that it might happen to you as it did to my dear friend, Mr. Haslam, whom God has blessed to the conversion of so many. He was preaching a sermon which he did not understand, and while he preached it, he converted himself. By God's grace he began to feel the power of the Holy Spirit and the force of divine truth. He so spake that a Methodist in the congregation presently cried out, "The parson is converted;" and so the parson was. He owned it, and praised God for it, and all the people sang—

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow."

His own utterances concerning Christ crucified had been to him the power of God unto salvation. O beloved, no man has any right to

teach in the Sunday-school, or preach, or pretend in any other way to be sent of God, unless he has been so taught of the Holy Spirit that he has an intimate acquaintance with the gospel.

I must add that *he should have a personal experience of it*, so that he can say, "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is." It is unseemly that an ignorant man should keep a school. It is not meet that a dumb man should teach singing. Shall an impenitent man preach repentance? Shall an unbelieving man preach faith? Shall an unholy man preach obedience to the divine will? Shall one that is living in sin preach of freedom from sin? Surely any person will be an unsuitable herald of the glad tidings of grace who speaks what he has never tried and verified. Before thou preach again, brother, pray God to enable thee to know in thine own soul, the truth of that which thou dost declare. Oh, that we may be born again, and so preach regeneration! Oh, that we may exercise faith, and then preach it! Surely it must be so. He who would learn to plough, must not be apprenticed to one who never turned a furrow. We must know the Lord or we cannot teach his way.

It strikes me, next, that *what is wanted in a successful teacher is a firm conviction of the truth of these things, growing out of his having tested them for himself.* He must say, with emphasis, "So it is." When I had found Christ, and joined the church, I began to teach in the Sabbath-school, but my little class of boys taught me more than I taught them. I was speaking to them one day about "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," and one of the boys said to me, "Teacher, have you believed?" I answered, "Yes." "And have you been baptized?" "Yes." "Then," said he, "teacher, you are saved." I said, "I hope so." Years ago it was a kind of fashion to say "I hope so;" and I followed my seniors in this modest talk. The boy looked me straight in the face, and said, "And don't you know, teacher?" Well, I felt that I did know, and that I ought not to have said "I hope so." So I replied, "Yes, I do know it." "Of course," said the boy, "the text says so. If it ain't true, well, of course, it ain't true; but if it is true, well, it is true, and nobody need *hope* about it." So it was. The boy used good logic. The Scripture saith, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"; therefore, he that believeth and is baptized is saved. That is clear enough, and let not the believer say that "he hopes so," but let him boldly assert that "it is so." You promise a man to pay him five pounds some day this week. Suppose you asked him, "Do you expect that I shall pay you that five pounds?" If he should answer, "I hope so," you would know what he thought of you. And it is very much the same when we thus speak of the Lord: we dishonour him when we say "I hope so," after he has said "it is so." The Lord's Word must be true. Why do you "hope" about it? Believe it and enjoy it. But people will go hoping and hoping, and hopping and limping; as if to be lame were the proper thing. They had better put both feet to the ground, and cry, "God has said it: I believe it. Glory be to his name, he shall have all the praise." "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart." When we teach others, we ought to have a firm conviction that

what we teach is true beyond all question. You cannot use a lever if you have no fixed fulcrum. You must have a point to work upon, or you cannot lift an ounce. So, in trying to teach another man, you must know that something or other is true. Infallibility used to be claimed for the pope, but Luther upset that nonsense. The Protestants then asserted that infallibility lay in the Bible; and this became their fulcrum. It seems to me that now it is commonly thought that infallibility lies nowhere; or, if there be any such thing, it is to be found among young green-horns, fresh from college, who do not know *A* from *B* in theology, and yet criticize the Bible, and cut it about as they choose. They are infallibles, and we must all bow down before their idol of advanced thought. I prefer my infallible Book, and I shall stick to it, God helping me, knowing that it has never led me astray, and believing that it never will. O dear teachers, know for a certainty what you teach, and, if you do not know it to be true, hold your tongues about it. If you are not sure that your doctrine is true, be quiet till you are sure. A ministry of hesitation must be ruinous to souls. When divine truth is held fast, then let it be held forth, and not till then.

Once more: *a needful qualification for a teacher of the Word is earnestness and good will to the hearer.* We must implore each one of our hearers to give earnest heed. We must cry to him with our whole heart, "Hear it, and know thou it for thy good." Without love, there can be no real eloquence. We must have a burning love for the souls of men, if we would win them for Jesus. Unless our hearts desire their good, we may preach our tongues out, but we shall never bring our hearers to salvation by Christ. The best bird-lime for these wild fowl is a longing desire for their present and eternal good. The great Saviour's heart is love, and those who are to be saviours for him must be of a loving spirit. True love will do the work when everything else has failed. A pastor has held the hearer by his heart long after his head has struggled away. A preacher had managed somehow to offend one of his hearers, and the angry man kept away from the place of worship for many a day. The preacher was not in the least aware that he had given offence; but when the matter came out, he went at once to set it right. The offended person had become settled in unbelief. The preacher went to him, and said that he had been sorry to miss him; and that he had been made ill by learning that he had become an unbeliever. Tears were in his eyes, and his voice was half choked, as he said, "Do you know, friend David, I cannot sleep at nights for thinking about you. I am so concerned about your soul that I cannot rest unless you are converted." The man had grown into the habit of blasphemy, and if he had been addressed in any other way he would have cursed the minister, and told him to go about his business; but that touch of real affection did it. "You concerned about my soul! Then it is time that I became concerned about it too": that was the reasoning which passed through David's mind. Oh, do let us love our hearers! Let us love them to Jesus. These are the bands that draw men to Jesus—the bands of love; and these are the cords that hold them to the Saviour—the cords of a man. We must wish our people to hear the truth, not

because we have prepared discourses which we cannot afford to waste upon an empty chapel, but because we feel sure that if they will hear the gospel it will do them good, and save their souls. We must sigh and cry for the souls of our hearers. We must preach with an intent, and that intent must not fall short of their eternal salvation. We must go as with a sword in our bones till we see our hearers yield their hearts to Jesus.

Knowledge of our subject avails not without love to our hearers. There are three ways of knowing, but only one sort is truly worth the having. Many labour *to know, merely that they may know.* These are like misers, who gather gold that they may count it, and hide it away in holes and corners. This is the avarice of knowledge; in some respects less mean than greed of gold, and yet of the same order of vices. Selfishness makes men anxious to know; mental selfishness urges them to toils most wearisome. Yet there may be much of this hoarded knowledge where there is no wisdom. Poor is the ambition to know—to know more than others, to know more to-day than we knew yesterday; to know what no one else knows. What of all this? To know, to know; this is the one thing with those who, like the horseleech, live only to suck and to be swollen. To what purpose is knowledge buried in the brain, like a crock of gold buried in a ditch? Such knowledge turns stagnant, like water shut up in a close pond—above mantled with rank weed, and below putrid, or full of loathsome life. A second class aspire *to know that others may know that they know.* To be reputed wise is the heaven of most mortals. To win a degree, and wear half-a-dozen letters of the alphabet at the end of your name, is the glory and immortality of many. To me the fashion seems cumbersome, and vexatious; but the grand use of these appended letters is to let the world know that this is a man who knows more than the average of his fellows. After all, it is no very great thing to make your neighbours aware that you are somebody in scientific circles; it is more magnanimous to do without the certificates, and let folks find out for themselves that you possess unusual information. One does not eat merely that others may know that you have had your dinner, and one should not know merely to have it known that you know. Why not wear letters after your name to signify that you own half a million of money, or farm a thousand acres of land, or fatten a hundred hogs? This is the grand end of wearisome days and nights, that the knowing ones may know that you know.

The third kind of knowledge is the one worth having. *Learn to know that you may make other people know.* This is not the avarice but the commerce of knowledge. Acquire knowledge that you may distribute it. Light the candle, but put it not under a bushel. Some are much buried under that bushel. My friend was half inclined to say a word or two for his Lord; but he did not, for he recollected the big bushel marked "TIMIDITY & Co.," and so he kept his light out of the way. Destroy that bushel, since it destroys your usefulness. If God has given you a candle, let it burn and shine; for light is given that eyes may see it. If God has lighted you from on high, do not deny your light to any far or near. Know that others may

know. Be taught that you may teach. This trading is gainful to all who engage in it.

Thus much upon the first point: the qualification of a teacher is intimate knowledge, personal experience, confidence, earnestness and good will.

II. Secondly, THE ARGUMENT FOR THE HEARER:—"Lo this, we have searched it, so it is."

The argument directed to the hearer is the experience of many, confirming the statement of one:—"We have searched it, so it is." Bacon has taught us from a mass of agreeing testimonies to infer a general truth. We are not now so foolish as to set up a theory, and then hunt for facts to support it; but we gather the facts first, and then deduce the theory from them. So here the three friends have made ample researches, and have arrived at certain conclusions; and they urge this reasoning upon Job. Unrenewed men cannot know much about Christ and his salvation except it be through the testimonies of their friends who have felt the power of divine grace: it is ours therefore to be witnesses for Christ to them, that they also may believe the truth, which can save their souls.

Without further preface I should like to bear my own personal witness to a few things about which I am fully persuaded. I am not afraid of dogmatism, but I shall speak very positively, since I can say, "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is."

And my first witness is that *sin is an evil and a bitter thing*. I think, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I may speak for you and say, "We have searched this out, and we know that it is so." We have seen sin prove injurious to our fellow-men. "Who hath woe, who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine. Men of strength to mingle strong drink." Whence cometh much of beggary but from dissipation? Whence cometh much of deadly disease but from uncleanness of life? Is not half the misery in the world the direct and distinct result of vice? I will not harrow up your feelings by telling you of young men and young women who bade fair for better things, but who turned aside to vice, and thus brought evil diseases into their bones. We could wish to forget their cries and moans with which they appalled us when they found that wild oats had to be reaped, and that each ear of those sheaves was as a flake of fire. By-and-by the guilty soul has to meet its God; what will be its terror! We know of ourselves, and in ourselves, that sin is a serpent, whose tooth infuses poison into the wound it makes. Sin brought some of us very low, and nothing but almighty grace restored us. It made some of us sit between the jaws of despair, and question whether it would not be better to put an end to our lives than continue to exist in such horrible gloom. Sin is that inquisition which deals in racks and fires, and all manner of infernal tortures. No misery can for a moment be compared with the torment which follows upon sin. We get neither pleasure nor profit by sin, though it may dupe us with the name of both. Sin is "evil, only evil, and that continually." This we have searched, and *so it is*. We wish that others who are beginning life would accept our testimony, and withhold their feet from the paths of the destroyer. It cannot be

needful that everybody should taste the poison cup: may not our mournful experience of sin's evil effects suffice for you? Sirs, you may search the purlieus of sin, from end to end, but you will never find a living joy therein. Wherefore, flee from it by God's grace.

I wish next to testify to the fact that *repentance of sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, bring a wonderful rest to the heart, and work a marvellous change in the whole life and character.* There is such a thing as the new birth, for we have been born again; and this not in mere fancy or sentiment, but as a plain matter of fact. We know what it is to have passed from death unto life, as surely as we know the difference between night and morning. Young man, have you any doubt about this? Will my testimony be of any avail to you? Do you think I would stand here, knowingly, and tell you what is false? I hope you do me justice, and admit that I aim at speaking the truth. There is such a thing as having the tastes all altered, the desires all changed, the fears removed, the hopes elevated, the passions subdued, the will conquered, the affections purified, and the mind sanctified. There is such a thing as having perfect rest about all the past, because sin is forgiven; perfect rest about the future, because we have committed our all to the hands of Christ, who is able to keep us; and peace as to the present, because we belong to Jesus. I speak for thousands in this place to-night when I say that repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ bestow on men a wonderful delight, and transform their characters by the Holy Ghost. That is worth knowing, is it not? Believe for yourselves, and realize personally the power of faith. "We have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

Next, we beg to bear our witness to the fact that *prayer is heard of God.* If it were possible for me to tell you the many instances in which God has heard my prayers, you would, in your kindness, follow me a considerable way, but I should have to draw so largely upon your faith, that before I came to the end, you would feel compelled to doubt. Nor should I blame you. Truth is stranger than fiction, and if you are not familiar with prayer, you will think me a mad fanatic. In matters in reference to the Stockwell Orphanage, I have seen the Lord's hand very conspicuously in times of need. When money has run short, and there have been hundreds of children to be fed, faith and prayer have filled our coffers. Well, sirs, men of the world may say it is all fancy, and laugh at it as a spiritual dream; but fancies do not load tables, and feed children, and supply thousands of pounds. Will one of you make the attempt? Will you provide for our five hundred orphans for a month by dreams and fancies? We have known times of close pinching, and have waited upon God, and in a short time he has sent us abundant relief, whereof there are brethren on this platform who would willingly bear witness. If there be no prayer-hearing God, we have played the fool; and yet no other sort of foolery has ever produced such surprising results. We know that God hears prayer. We are personally sure of it, because we have tried it for ourselves. I wish that anybody here who is in doubt about it would try the power of prayer. Go to God in prayer—ay, even you that are

unconverted—and see whether the Lord will not hear you. Somebody says, "Surely that is unsound advice! How can the unconverted pray?" Let me tell you a story. I was preaching, years ago, to the Sunday-school children of a certain country town, where the people were Calvinistic, and a point or two more. They received sixteen ounces to the pound of the gospel, and they liked an ounce or two above full weight. I made the observation to the children that before I had been renewed by grace, I, as a child, was in trouble, and I went to God in supplication, and he helped me. I need not repeat the circumstances; but it seemed to me that the Lord heard my childish pleading, and helped me. This experience led me to feel that there was a reality in prayer; for God had heard me. When I came out from the chapel, where I had mentioned this circumstance, a number of grave persons who were both sound and sour in the faith, beset me round about like bees. They began asking, "How can a natural man pray a spiritual prayer? How can God accept a prayer which is merely natural, since he is a Spirit? If prayer is not wrought by the Holy Ghost it is an idle form"; and so on, and so on. It is difficult to conceive how many quibbles can be made upon one point. I was about twenty years of age, but I did my best to defend myself, for I had stated a fact, and a fact is a stubborn thing. At any rate, I held my own; but I do not know that I should have won the victory if I had been left alone. A grand old woman in a red cloak pressed forward into the middle of the ring, and addressed the doubly-sound brethren, whom she knew better than I did. With an almost prophetic air she looked on them and said, "O fools and slow of heart to come here and cavil with this young servant of the Lord. Hearken to me, and be convinced, and go home in silence. Does not the Lord hear the young ravens when they cry? Do they pray spiritual prayers? Does the Holy Ghost work prayer in them? If God hears the natural prayers of crying ravens, will he not hear the cries of children?" This was fine. The adversaries vanished out of my sight. There was no overcoming a statement so Scriptural. God does hear prayer. We bear our witness to that fact with all our strength, and therefore we say about it: "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

Another testimony we would like to bear, namely, that *obedience to the Lord, though it may involve present loss, is sure to be the most profitable course for the believing man to take.* If you will serve the Lord Jesus Christ, you will not find your road all smooth; but you will find it more pleasant than serving the devil. Satan said of Job, "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about all that he hath?" It was most true, but the Lord God might have answered the devil, "Would you have my servants unrewarded? It is from you that service meets no reward but death. Do you think I would have you able to say, 'God's servants serve him for nothing. Even Job gets no return for his faithful obedience'?" Beloved, we may not expect immediate success in business because we walk in the path of integrity. We may for a time be losers by being honest, and may miss many a chance by abhorring deception. But we do not measure things by the inch, and by the ounce, when we come to deal with

eternal matters. Brethren, here we leave the clock and its ticking, and speak of the glory and immortality which belong to the infinite and the eternal. Coming into those larger regions, we declare that nothing can be obtained, worth the getting, by a lie, or by a trick, or by falling into sin. The most profitable course in life that any man can take is to do the right in every case. If it should involve loss, do right, and suffer the consequences; for there are other compensating consequences which will make a man a gainer by uprightness, even if he should lose the clothes from his back. To have done right is to have a well-spring of joy within the heart. Some of us have tried this, and are sure about it. There are aged persons here, who can tell you that they owe everything in life to having been enabled by the grace of God to act uprightly in their youth. I know one who is at this moment in a fine position, whose rise in life dates from the moment when his employer bade him say that he was not at home, and he answered, "Sir, I could not say *that*. I cannot tell a lie." From that day his promotion in the office was constant and rapid. Another felt himself unable to cast up the firm's accounts on Sunday, but before long was so prized that nobody would have suggested such a thing to him. A straightforward course is the nearest way to success. We bear our testimony that righteousness is the best course. We cannot say, "Honesty is the best policy; we have tried both that and thieving, and honesty pays best"; but, for all that, if you consider the law of the Lord you will be considering your own interests. Take notice of this testimony: righteousness is wisdom. A straight line is the shortest way between any two places. "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

I have many things to say, but our hours fly like the cherubim: each one hath six wings. We beg to say that *the old-fashioned gospel is able to save men, and to arouse enthusiasm in their souls.* Here—here is the best proof! Look around upon this vast assembly. Have we any music, any candles, any millinery? Have we anything here to attract people but simply the preaching of the old, old gospel? Our service is so severely simple as to be called bare. Have I varied from the old way and the old faith—ay, by the eighth part of a hair's breadth? Have I not kept to the gospel, and set it forth in simple language? Lo, here I come to the end of thirty-seven years, and before me are the same multitudes of people as at the first. Young preacher, you will not need anything but Christ Jesus should you be spared to preach as long as I have done. When everybody seems to say that orthodoxy is spun out, God will send us a revival, and the despised doctrines of grace will be to the front again, and Christ shall make them his chariot, in which he will ride forth conquering, and to conquer. Behold, even at this day, a company of the poorest of the people proclaim the gospel in its roughest form, and preach it in our streets and lanes; and the crowd is stirred therewith, as it never is by any other theme. Notwithstanding all the infidelity of the times, faith is lifting the standard still. Hold to the faith and to the cross! Preach sin down: preach Christ up. Preach the atoning sacrifice, preach in the power of the Holy Spirit. Such

preaching is sufficient for the purposes of salvation. "Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good."

III. I close now with our third point: we have here THE EXHORTATION TO THE ENQUIRER. What do we say to him? "This, we have searched it, so it is; *hear it.*" I need hardly address that exhortation to most of the present assembly. Hear it you do, with a delight which is remarkable. But you know how matters tend in London in these sad days. The masses of the people will not come to hear of Jesus and his love. They often pass by a street-preacher, and have no curiosity to know what it is which has brought him out into the open-air. But oh, if you wish to be saved, hear the gospel! Let nothing keep you away from God's sanctuary, where the real gospel is proclaimed. Hear it! If it is not preached exactly in the style which you would prefer, nevertheless, hear it. "Faith cometh by hearing." Come out on Sunday morning, you working-men that are sitting at home in your shirt-sleeves. Come out and hear. I cannot make out what some of you do: you work hard all the week round, and when the day of rest arrives, you have no hope of heaven, and no hunger after salvation. Life is a poor thing if it ends here. Do you believe that all you can possess is to be had on this side the grave? It is a poor look-out. Do you fancy that your life can be nothing better than an endless turning of the grindstone? Were you born merely to toil for daily bread? Is there nothing higher and better? If you say that you will die like dogs, I dare not think so meanly of you as you think of yourselves. You have only begun to exist. You have to live for ever. You will exist in eternity as surely as God shall live, world without end. Shall it be an immortality of happiness, or an eternal existence of woe? Do, I pray you, think about this; and if there be a gospel (and you believe there is), then hear it, hear it, hear it, till by the hearing of it God sends you faith, and faith grasps salvation!

The next thing that he says is "*know it.*" Hear it and know it; go on hearing it until you know it. If you cannot quite attain to knowing it by hearing it, read your Bibles and seek the Lord till you are made to know the sublime secret. Ask Christian men and women to explain difficulties to you that so you may know it. By getting a clear view of the plan of salvation, know what you must do to be saved. If you do not know anything else, know this essential matter. Christ crucified is the most precious piece of knowing which you can ever come at. To know Christ is life eternal. Look to him till you see in him your life, your love, your God, your heaven, your all. Blessed is the man that findeth this wisdom, for he hath found an endless blessedness.

Our text means—*know it in a particular way.* "Know thou it *for thy good.*" The devil knows a great deal. He knows more than the most intelligent of us; but he knows nothing for his good. All that he knows sours into evil within his rebellious nature. There is a way of knowing a great deal, and yet of getting no good out of it; like Samson's lion, which had a mass of honey within it, and yet had never tasted the sweetness of it, for it was a dead lion. You may have all the knowledge of Solomon, and yet you may know nothing for your

good, but end your days with the terrible wailing, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

How is a man to know anything for his good? This knowledge must first be *a practical knowledge*. Does the Word say "Repent"? If you want to know what repentance means, repent at once. You need not go to the Catechism or to the Creed for a definition; repent, and you know what repentance means. Be changed in mind, confess your sin, and forsake it. Be sorry for sin; see the wrong of it; quit it. You will know what repentance is when you have repented. If you want to know what faith is, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and when you have believed, you will know what believing is. The best way to know a virtue is to practise it. Somebody said, "What is the best way to tell a sinner the way of salvation?" The answer given was, "The best way to tell him is to tell him." So it is. The very best way to eat your dinner is to eat it. We get confounding and confusing ourselves with trivial distinctions, whereas we had better throw distinctions to the dogs, and get to soul-winning. You will never catch hares with drums, nor souls with controversies. Come to Jesus, sinner! Come to Jesus! Believe in Jesus, sinner! believe in Jesus at once! "He that doeth his will shall know of his doctrine." You will know the truth when from the heart you have obeyed it. God help you to exercise this practical faith at once. "Know thou it for thy good."

To know a thing for our good is to know it *for ourselves*. "Know it for thy good." I find that one rendering is, "Know it for thyself." Another man's God is no God to me: he must be "My Lord and my God." Another man's Christ is no Christ for you; he must reveal himself to you personally. Another man's faith is no faith for you. God must be your God, Christ must be your Christ, and the faith that saves you must be your own faith. God grant that it may be so; then you will know the Lord personally for your good.

I must add that we only know things for our good when we *know them believingly*. To a sinner a promise is as dark as a threatening, if he does not believe it. Christ, to an unbelieving sinner, is simply a judge. Christ's very death becomes "a savour of death unto death" to the unbeliever, and it cannot be "a savour of life unto life" to him unless it be mixed with faith. When you believe in Jesus, there is a vein of grace for you in every doctrine of the Bible. You know the promise of the Lord, and you know it for your good, when you humbly believe that it is so, and humbly take it to yourself because you are resting in Christ.

I would to God that many here would know these things for their good! If they did, I should be happy indeed, and so would they be.

Now I have done; but I should like to say this: If there is nothing in religion, why do you come here? If there is salvation in believing in Christ, why are you not saved? You say there is a hell. Why are you going there? You know that there is a heaven. Why are you not preparing for it? You know that there is a Christ, whose wounds bleed salvation; why are you not looking to him? Is it all to be play, this religion of ours—going to meetings, sitting in your seats, and listening to the preacher? I would rather be silent than

be fiddling to your dancing; or go through the service merely to spend a Sabbath in a decorous manner. Sirs, if you are not saved what shall I do? What shall I do? If you are saved, we will meet in heaven, and we will praise God for ever, each one of us, and our Lord shall have all the glory. But if you are lost—if you are lost—I cannot come to you, nor can you come to me. Let me do what I can for you before the great gulf divides us. What, what shall I say when I render in my account? Shall I tell the Lord that you were not saved because I was afraid to tell you that there was a hell, and I kept back every threatening doctrine, and tried to make things pleasant to you, whether you were saved or not? I could not make that profession, even if it could save your souls; for it would not be in any measure true. "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God," as far as I know it. God is my witness, and so are your consciences, that I have longed for your conversion. You that have heard me these years, if you are lost, it will not be for want of pleading with, nor for want of instruction, nor from lack of entreaties. O souls, why will you die? Why will you keep on procrastinating, and crying "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow"? Why should it always be to-morrow? There will be no to-morrow of hope for you when once you are lost. Flee now to Christ. I pray you, by the living God, and by the heaven which he gives to those who believe in Christ, hasten to Jesus! Trust yourselves to Jesus now. By that dreadful doom which will surely fall on every man who dies rejecting Christ, I beseech you flee from the wrath to come. Lord, grant that it may be so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job v.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—245, 23 (Vers. III.), 757.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

The following note from Mr. Spurgeon was read at the Tabernacle last Lord's-day. The publishers feel sure that sermon-readers everywhere will pray for the speedy recovery of the suffering preacher:—

"DEAR FRIENDS,—I have been in great pain day and night all this week. I earnestly entreat your prayers, for I am brought very low.

"Yours ever heartily,

"Menton, November 20, 1890." "C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE LORD NO MORE WROTH WITH HIS PEOPLE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 7TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee."—Isaiah liv. 9.

BEFORE any person could feel himself safe in applying such a word as this to himself, he would naturally read the chapter, and study the connection in which it stands, to see whether it would be a wresting of Scripture for any private believer to understand it as being spoken by God to himself. Doing this, you will very soon be satisfied that every true believer has his just portion here. Observe the closing words of the chapter: "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord"—not of Jews or Gentiles as such, but of the servants of the Lord, be they of what race they may. It is not written that this *was* their heritage in some past dispensation, or shall be their heritage in some brighter era yet to come; but "This *is* the heritage of the servants of the Lord." Each one, therefore, may conclude that if he is a servant of the Lord this is his own heritage.

But how are we to know these servants of the Lord? What is the distinguishing mark set upon them? The next words tell us this—"And their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." If there be anyone among us whose righteousness is his own, wrought out by himself, he is excluded from this heritage; but whoever in our number has learned personally, and for himself, to call the Lord Jesus "The Lord our righteousness," he may claim the blessings of this chapter as his own. Without committing a spiritual robbery, everyone who is justified in Christ Jesus may feel that every sentence in this chapter belongs to him. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord." Am I a servant of the Lord? Do I serve him out of love?

The prophet further adds, "And their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." Have I a righteousness that is divine in its origin and character? If so, then, my soul, come thou boldly to the Master's table, and whatever dainties the Lord may heap thereon, do thou feed upon them freely; for this is the children's meat which the heavenly

Father has here set before them, and they will be guilty of no presumption if they take it all to themselves, and feast thereon to the full. May the Holy Spirit work in us this holy liberty!

In trying to deal with the text in a somewhat superficial manner—for it would be impossible, in the short time we have this evening, to explore its depths—we shall notice two things: first, *what men have the most cause to fear;* and secondly, *what the saints need never fear.*

I. And, first, WHAT MEN HAVE MOST TO FEAR.

All men who are unsaved ought, with fear and trembling, to *dread the wrath of God*—the wrath present, and the wrath to come. The text speaks of the Lord's being wroth, as of an evil to be feared. Man has cause to be afraid of *the rebuke of God* which is named in our text—that stern rebuke of the Holy One which is the prelude to the lifting-up of his unsheathed sword, and the destruction of his adversaries. God's anger and rebuke make up the utmost form of terror; and if men were not maddened by sin they would confess that it is so.

God's wrath is matter for fear, because, dear friends, *to be in union with God is necessary to the happiness of the creature.* To have God for its enemy is for the creature to be removed from its foundation, and placed where it cannot abide. The whole universe stands because God's power supports it: only because it is so far in unison with the will of God does it exist in order, peacefulness, and joy. Take God away from the world, and the world would become dark, dead, drear, desolate: nay, I correct myself, there would be no world. This great sun, the moon, and stars would all subside into their native nothing, even as a moment's foam melts back into the wave that bears it, and is gone for ever. In the same way, an intelligent being, a spiritual nature, without its Creator, is lost—lost as a sheep which has strayed from the shepherd, lost to all that renders life worth the having. It were better for such a creature that it had never had an existence; for the wrath of God, when it goes forth in the form of a rebuke upon a thoughtful man, is as a seven-fold plague. God's rebuke on any creature is a withering thing, but on an intelligent being it is hell. Some have felt it to a fearful degree in this life. Remember Cain, who went forth from the presence of God a marked man. Who among us would like to have known his dread, living in fear that whosoever should find him would kill him; a man accursed of the Most High, and marked among his fellow-men? We read of Pashur, in the days of Jeremiah, who had the rebuke of God dwelling upon him, so that he became a terror to himself. Remember the word of the Lord in the book of Deuteronomy, where the Lord threatens his erring people: "And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life." What a rebuke is this! The voice of God had gone forth against him, and his soul trembled. Think of that proud mortal who heard God's voice of rebuke in the midst of his revelry and mirth—that God-defying monarch, Belshazzar, whose knees knocked together, and the joints of his loins were loosed, because he had seen the handwriting of God upon the wall. The

rebuke of God burns up a man's spirit, turns his moisture into the drought of summer, and withers him like a flower broken off at the stalk, or like the hay that has fallen in the sun beneath the scythe! Oh, if such a calamity should ever come upon us, we shall have reason indeed to say, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath"!

This wrath of God is to be feared, my brethren, all the more *because there is no escaping from it.* A man who is under the wrath of a monarch can escape to another kingdom; a man who has incurred the anger of the most mighty enemy can find, somewhere in this great world, a nook wherein he can conceal himself from his relentless pursuer. But he that has exposed himself to the wrath of God cannot save himself from the Almighty hand. Though thou hide thyself on the top of Carmel, yet there the Omniscient eye shall see thee; and though thou fly to the clefts of the rock, like the eagle, yet God will find thee out. There is no escaping from his presence. Even though the beams of the morning sun should lend us wings, he would arrive before his fugitive. There is no place, even should we dive beneath hell's profoundest wave, where he could not reach us. It was said, in the days of the Cæsars, that the whole world was but one great prison for those who were the enemies of the emperor. It is so. Earth itself, and heaven, and hell, are but one vast dungeon for the man who is the object of the wrath of God, and against whom the sentence of doom has gone forth from the eternal lip. A rebuke that withers! A rebuke from which there is no escape! Well may sinners who deserve it admire the longsuffering which invites to mercy, and tremble lest the word of wrath should take its place, and pursue them to the death.

There is this also to be dreaded in the wrath of God, that, as there is no escape from it, so *there is no cure for it.* Nothing can possibly give a man ease or safety when the rebuke of God has gone forth against him. He may be surrounded with temporal comforts, but his riches will only mock his inner poverty. Friends may utter words of cheer; but miserable comforters shall they all be.

> "When HE shuts up in long despair,
> Who can remove the iron bar?"

If God speak the word in wrath, none can reverse the sentence. He shutteth, and no man openeth.

Instead of the mercies of this life becoming any comfort to him, when a man has the wrath of God resting upon him, it is written, "I will curse all your blessings." Oh, terrible words! when the curse follows a man in his basket and in his store, in the fruit of his body, and in the object of his life; follows him to his bed, to his board, to his work, and to his rest! O wretched being! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. Blessed God! we thank thee that thou hast not yet so spoken against us, but hast left us yet on praying ground, and pleading terms with thee, and sent us once again the voice of inviting mercy, saying, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Had thy rebuke gone forth against us, we had been utterly consumed with terrors.

Worse still, my brethren: the rebuke of God, if we live and die impenitent, *is one against which we cannot harden ourselves.* We cannot gather strength to endure when God strikes at the heart and dries up the spirit. There are some pains of the body which, at first, are so tormenting, that patience, while suffering from them, seems impossible; but after a certain season the nerve grows dull, or, at any rate, use blunts the edge of pain, or the faintness of the flesh comes to the assistance of the sufferer. But it is not so with the wrath of God. No shield can ward off the arrows of Almighty justice. The Lord knows how to smite the man, not merely in hand, or foot, or head, but in the heart. The arrows of God stick fast in the man's inner self; they wound his spirit; and "a wounded spirit who can bear?" Some of those who have been the most impudent braggarts against God, have whined like cowards, and cried out—or, as the prophet puts it, "howled upon their beds"—when he has but touched them with his finger. They cursed God until it came to dying, and then they changed their tune to one of craven fear. How often have atheists turned into trembling confessors when eternity has been in view! They could say once, "Who is the Lord that we should serve him?" but, when they saw death approaching, and sin pursued their soul with furies, they cried and entreated the Lord that he would have mercy. He knows, O ye stout-hearted ones, he knows how to find out the joints in what you think to be your invulnerable harness! He can pierce you so that you can no longer stand up against him. He can break the point of your spear, and turn the edge of your sword; and then you will lie at the mercy of the God whom your sins have provoked. Beware how ye dash yourselves upon the bosses of his buckler, for you will only slay yourselves. In vain do ye boast yourselves, for by strength shall no man prevail. Oh, the wrath to come! The lapse of years shall never help a man to harden himself against the punishment of sin, which will for ever be "the wrath to come." Hell shall be as intolerable when it has been borne a thousand years as it was when first the soul was cast therein. Throughout eternity there will be no relief to condemned spirits from the burden of their sinfulness; for as they will cling to sin, so will sin cling to them. No drop of consolation will fall into the cup of eternal woe; but the impenitent shall drink for ever of the wine of the wrath of God.

Here remember, my brethren, the tremendous and overwhelming fact, *that the wrath of God does not end with death.* This is a truth which the preacher cannot mention without trembling, nor without wondering that he does not tremble more. The eternity of punishment is a thought which crushes the heart. You have buried the man, but you have not buried his sins. His sins live, and are immortal: they have gone before him to judgment, or they will follow after him to bear their witness as to the evil of his heart and the rebellion of his life. The Lord God is slow to anger, but when he is once aroused to it, as he will be against those who finally reject his Son, he will put forth all his omnipotence to crush his enemies. "Consider this," saith he, "ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." It will be no trifle to fall into the

hands of the living God. He will by no means clear the guilty. For ever must his anger burn. We have nothing in Scripture to warrant the hope that God's wrath against evil doers will ever come to an end. Oh, the wrath to come! The wrath to come! The wrath which after ages and ages will still be to come, and still to come, and still to come! Well might that mighty pleader, Whitefield, when he preached, lift up his hands, and with streaming eyes and breaking heart cry to the crowds—"Oh, the wrath to come, the wrath to come!"

This, then, is what men have most to dread. Did you ever dread it? He that never dreaded it, nor felt in his spirit a trembling and a fear concerning it—alas for him, he has the strongest cause for alarm! Well do I remember when this awful truth rolled over my spirit like the huge car of Juggernaut. I then thought myself to be utterly crushed and lost, and in a hopeless state; and, truly, so I should have been but for amazing grace. Happy was it for me that I did see myself to be obnoxious to the divine anger; for I had never laid my sins upon Christ, if I could have carried them myself; I had never leaned upon his strength if I had been strong enough to stand by my own power. If it had not been a hopeless, helpless case with me, I had never closed in with the Lord Jesus and made him to be all my hope and help. When the wrath of God, burning in my spirit, had consumed every other hope, oh, then it was sweet to come to Christ, and find in him all consolation and salvation!

II. Enough upon this point. The delightful theme I wish to enlarge upon is this: WHAT THE SAINTS NEED NEVER FEAR. Dreadful as it is, and more than sufficient to overwhelm the spirit with dismay, a fear of the wrath of God need never disturb the believer's heart.

Let us read: "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." God has sworn that he will never be wroth with his people. He does not say that he will never be so angry with their sins as to chasten them sharply; for anger with our sins is love to us. He does not say that he will not be so angry as to punish us; although there would be great mercy even in that; but he goes much further, and says, that he will never be so wroth with his people as even to rebuke them; he will not let his wrath rise so high as to draw an angry word from him. "What!" say you, "then doth not God rebuke his people?" Ah, verily, that he doth, and chasten them too! but those rebukes and those chastisements are in love, and not in wrath. The text before us is to be read thus: "I will not be wroth with thee so as to rebuke thee in indignation." There shall never be so much as a word of wrath from the lips of God, touching any one of his servants whose righteousness is of him. So doth he love those who are in Christ Jesus, so completely hath he absolved them, that not in anger will he speak so much as one word against them.

Now, this, to make us sure of it, is first of all *confirmed by an oath:* "So have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." We ought to believe God's bare word: we are bound to accept his promise as certainty itself; but who will dare to doubt the *oath* of the Eternal? You cannot accuse a man of anything more

horrible than perjury: can you be so profane as to lay this at the door of God? To suspect him of having sworn dishonestly, or dream that he can make a breach of that covenant which he has sealed by an oath—this would be a crime against the thrice-holy Lord. Shall we tarnish the glory of God, by a suspicion that he will break his oath? And yet, perhaps, we are doing so. Under heavy chastisement you are saying—"The Lord is wroth with me; he has turned his heart against me." While you are feeling in your body the smart of fierce disease, or in your estate a gradual decay of your property; or in the person of that dear dead child, or in the decease of that beloved wife or husband, you are seeing the hand of God going out against you, it may be you say, "This cannot be love; the Lord must be wroth with me—so wroth with me as to be smiting me with the blows of a cruel one." But, dear child of God, you must not think so for a moment. The Lord has sworn that he would not be wroth with you, and he cannot break his oath. Nothing but love can guide the hand of his providence. It is not possible that there is even a mixture of motives in his dealings with you. Undiluted affection arranges every step, and perhaps it is because of the greatness of his affection that you are called upon to suffer so grievously. We all acknowledge that when a father strings up his nerves at last to chastise his darling child, he then gives clearest proof of wise love, since every blow of the rod falls heavier on the father's heart than ever it can on the child's flesh. It is true love which whips the erring heir of glory from his sin. To fondle and spoil a rebel were folly, and cruelty would show that the father had not love enough to his child to study his best interests; but we see the triumph of love when a wise parent, out of supreme affection, grieves himself by chastening his child. Your heavenly Father doth not afflict willingly; but he has a loving reason for every stripe. In all your affliction he is afflicted, and he brings himself to afflict you—if I may use such a term—as you bring yourself to the chastening of your child. Love seems to behave itself strangely when it wields the rod and bruises its darling; but indeed it is then most truly love. I charge you, as you love your God, and would not dare to accuse him of falsehood, do not believe for an instant that he is wroth with you, or will rebuke you in anger. The rebuke he sends is a rebuke of undiluted love. Not a grain of divine anger is to be found in a mountain of divine affliction. Jehovah swears there is not: can you do other than believe him?

As if still further to illustrate the certainty of this, *he is pleased to draw a parallel between his present covenant oath and that which he made in the days of Noah with the second great father of the human race.* He said to Noah that the waters should no more go over the earth so as to destroy all flesh from off it, and he gave him the rainbow as a sign that this should never be. Observe, that *the covenant made with Noah was a covenant of pure grace;* for Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord. The Lord will deal with us also according to his grace. God destroyed the earth because it was corrupt; and assuredly it is corrupt again. Many times since Noah's day the earth has been polluted with crying sins that might well have provoked God to turn the torrents upon our race. Those were horrible days when all men did as seemed good

in their own eyes in the days of the Judges! You cannot read the histories of the kings of Israel without feeling sick at heart. The other nations were no better than the Jews, and probably were much worse; yet the chosen people were as vile as vile could be. What horrible days were those of the Roman emperors, when those who governed the world were monsters in iniquity, and all lands reeked with vice! What cloudy days were those of the Middle Ages, when to be a genuine Christian was to be hunted to death; when every kind of superstition and villainy had sway! The Lord might well have drowned the world in any one of those times quite as justly as he did in the days of Noah. It was of his grace, then, that although he foresaw that the world would still be corrupt, and that every imagination of man's heart would still be evil, he yet said that he would not destroy the earth, but that his longsuffering should patiently wait till the end should be. Now, beloved, this covenant of pure grace is paralleled by the covenant we have been speaking of in your case. He has said, "I have sworn that I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." "Ah!" you say, "but my sins, my many imperfections, my shortcomings, my glaring failures, my frequent backslidings, my coldness of heart, my laxity in prayer, the mistakes into which I fall through carelessness, my unbelief, my thousand sins—surely he will be wroth with me on account of these?" But have I not shown you that he might a thousand times have been wroth with the world so as to destroy it with water, but because of his covenant he was not so? The covenant was not made on account of what men would be, for the Lord foresaw that they would be evil continually; but he made a covenant because his mercy is great and his tenderness is infinite. He has made the like covenant with you, and your sins shall not disannul it. Sinner as you are, it is written: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Defiled as you are, yet you fly to the fountain and are washed, and the Lord is not wroth with you, neither doth he rebuke you. As he made a covenant of pure grace not to destroy the world with water, so he has made a covenant of pure grace with you not to be wroth with you; and until the one fails the other will not. Oh, rejoice that God has put your freedom from wrath upon so sure a footing!

But, *that first covenant with Noah was made after a sacrifice.* Noah offered a sacrifice of clean beasts unto God, and it is said that the Lord smelled a sweet savour, or a savour of rest, and shortly after that it was that he made the covenant not to destroy the earth. So, you see, the flood is kept away from us through a covenant of sacrifice. Now, beloved, the same reason so works with God that he will not be wroth with you, nor rebuke you. There is a sacrifice in which God always smells a sweet savour of rest, and therefore you are secure. Ah! it is not you that are acceptable to him in yourselves; oh, no! but you are "accepted in the Beloved." Oh, that precious sentence: "Accepted in the Beloved"! We have no personal sweetness; but because of the savour of our Lord's good ointments, therefore are his members fragrant unto God. Christ is as precious incense unto God at all times, and this is the reason of our salvation. You recollect how the Israelites were preserved in Egypt on the night of the Passover.

It was not said to them, "When *you* look at the blood I will pass over you," or, "When *I* look at *you* I will pass over you;" but God said: "*When I see the blood, I will pass over you.*" God's eye was fixed on the blood on the lintel, and saw in that the type of the precious blood of Jesus, and therefore he passed over his people. And so the Lord's eye is fixed on Jesus and his precious sacrifice; and God is, for his sake, well pleased with us, and utters no condemning word. When your sins rise in your conscience, and you repent most bitterly of them, and are downcast in your spirit concerning them, yet still, let not your sense of sin cause you to question this solemn declaration, sworn to by God's own mouth—"I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." Be sure of God's favour, for you see the reason of it: he does not look at you as you are in yourself, but as you are in Christ. He answers that sweet prayer we sometimes sing—

> "Him, and then the sinner see,
> Look through Jesu's wounds on me."

As he is not wroth with the earth so as to drown it; so, because of the sacrifice, he will not be wroth with us so as to rebuke us in anger.

Remark again: *that covenant which God made with Noah was openly propounded in the ears of the whole race.* Noah and his sons heard it, and we have all heard it. God has openly said, "I will no more cause the water to cover the face of the earth." Now, when a man makes a promise, if it is in private he is bound by it, and his honour is engaged thereto; but when his solemn promise becomes public, he stakes his character among men upon the fulfilment of his word. We are accustomed to say—"If he didn't mean to do it, why did he make it so public? Why did he say it in this place and in that place?" Now, since the Lord has made public this gracious word—"I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee," does he not intend to do as he has said? Would he write it thus, as it were athwart the sky, if he did not mean to keep it? Hath he spoken in secret, and disannulled this which he spake in public? His answer is—"I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain." His promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Not the dot of an i, nor the cross of a t shall ever fail. None of his words shall fall to the ground. Christ has not come to put any one of God's words away, but that they all may be established; and, my brethren, heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of the promises of our God shall fail.

Let it be remarked, also, concerning the parallel between the one promise and the other, that *God never has broken the covenant which he made with Noah.* There have been partial floods, which have carried off the inhabitants of a valley; but the race of man has never been swept away with water since the days of Noah and the ark, and I do not think there is any man here who suspects that they will be. When the showers begin to fall, it is always delightful to mark that radiant bow set there in the sky, that God may look upon it, and remember his covenant; and that we may look upon it, and remember that covenant too. How gloriously is it painted on the darkness of the cloud! How plainly it says to us, "Fear not!" Now, beloved, if

the Lord be so faithful to one covenant, why should we imagine, even in our worst moments, that he will be unfaithful to his other word which he has spoken concerning our souls? Dear heart, he that is true in one will be true in another! When you have trusted a person, and found him scrupulously upright in one instance, it would be a shame to mistrust him in another till you have a cause. You have never had any cause to doubt your God. Has he forgotten his oath? Has he pulled up the sluices of the great deep, and bidden the secret fountains leap up from their ancient lair? Has he unstopped the bottles of heaven by the month together, and bade them pour out floods which should cover the tops of the hills, and drown the whole race of Adam? Ye are living witnesses that it is not so. Well, then, be this a proof to you of the truthfulness of the Lord our God. Doubt not his love to you until he shall have broken the covenant that he made with Noah, since he saith, "This is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." If you can, any of you, fully drink in the Lord's meaning, you do not want any more words of mine: the Lord's words are more than enough. Drink in the divine truth, and let it saturate your inmost spirit. God saith, "I will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee," by which he intends to say, "Whatever I do to thee, it shall not be in wrath; wherever I cast thee—into the wilderness, into the furnace, into the grave—there shall be no wrath in my act; no, not to the extent of a rebuke. All that I do to thee shall be love, love, love; nothing but love from first to last." Surely this word is marrow and fatness! What more could the Lord say to us? What more could we desire? God grant that the wines on the lees well refined stored up in this text may make a feast for all believers!

Now, I want to say to you, dear friends, that if this be the case, that God will not be wroth with us, nor rebuke us, then *the greatest fear that can ever fall upon us is gone, and it is time that all our lesser fears were gone with it.* For instance, there is *the fear of man.* This man says that, and that man says the other; and some people attach a wonderful deal of importance to what other people say, and so they are carried away with the fear of man's opinion. Why can they not catch the spirit of that brave nobleman who had carved over his castle gates the words: "They say. What do they say? Let them say." We do not always attain to such independence of mind, but we ought to do so. Ordinarily we tremble because of man, though he is but grass, and withers like the flower of the field. But, when we clearly understand that God is not wroth with us, we feel raised above the rage of mortals. Now, Herod, mock at thy pleasure! Now, Pilate, ask thy sarcastic questions! Now, scribes and Pharisees, meet in your councils! The Lord is not wroth with us, and what do we care for you? Let the earth be removed, let the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, let the waters thereof roar and be troubled; since God is not wroth with us, and does not rebuke us, we can stand like solid rocks in the midst of the hurly-burly of the storm, and laugh to scorn the turmoil. Towards the anger of men

we turn the armour of believing endurance now that the Lord's anger is turned away from us once for all.

So, too, *we need not fear the devil.* He is the most cunning of our adversaries, and being exceeding wroth with us, he goeth about to deceive and to devour; but, brethren, if God will never be wroth with us, the teeth of the old dragon are broken. His only hope is that God will be wroth with us, and for this purpose he leadeth us, if he can, into sin; but if he cannot effect his design, to what purpose are all his arts? O fool of fools, Prince of Darkness! A mass of cunning and folly art thou! O thou fiend of hell!—the very children in Zion laugh thee to scorn, and shake their heads at thee; for they shall tread thee beneath their feet shortly, and gloriously shall they triumph over all thy power. If God will not be wroth with me, nor rebuke me, why should I fear though all hell's legions should march against me?

Dear brethren, if God will never be wroth with us, nor rebuke us, we need not fear any of *the chastisements which he may lay upon us.* There is a vast difference between a blow that is given in anger and a pat that is given in love. Your children soon perceive the difference. A little one is in your arms, and if you do but pat it lightly in anger it begins to cry; but if your hand fell heavily in sport, and it saw that you only meant a love-pat, it would laugh. So we rejoice in tribulations, and glory in afflictions, because they come from the deep love of God. When we perceive that love is written on our trials, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." I am glad the text does not say, "I will never rebuke thee, even in love." It would be an awful text, if it said that! Blessed be God, he does rebuke us! If it had been said, "I will never rebuke thee, nor chasten thee," why, what would follow? Is it not written, "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons"? If there were no rebukes, no chastisements, it would be a sure sign that the Lord had cast the reins on our necks, and had said, "He is joined to idols; let him alone." We do not desire that the Lord should promise us freedom from trial. The true-born child of God must not escape trouble, and, if he be wise, he would not if he might. Since there is no anger in affliction, let the Lord chastise his servants even as seemeth good in his sight; all our souls shall say is this, "Rebuke us not in anger; and then, thy will be done!" The sorrows of this mortal life lose all their sharpness when we believe that the Lord will not be wroth with us, nor rebuke us.

My brethren, how *this alters the look of death.* If death be a punishment to a believer, then death wears gloomy colours; but if it be not so, if death itself has changed its character, so as not to be to the believer a punishment for sin, how delightful is this! The believer's punishment was fully borne by his Substitute, so that the bitterness of death is past. It is not death to die: it is only undressing. These poor garments are dusty with toil, and withal, in some cases, they are ragged with age, and therefore we may be well content to put them off. "Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." Dying—why, it is only

going to our bed-chamber to sleep a while, and then to wake up, at the sound of the trumpet, in the likeness of our Lord. Dying—why to our souls it is the entrance into the joy of our Lord; it is passing into the ivory palaces, wherein they have made him glad, and wherein we shall be made glad in his blessed company. O brethren, the smell of his garments at a distance—how overpowering it is! The myrrh, and the aloes, and the cassia, delight our souls! What will be the fragrance when we are in the Beloved's arms? What must be the glory when we stand at his right hand clothed in the gold of Ophir? What must it be to be *there?* Since, then, death is changed from a foe to a friend, and in death the Lord does not even so much as rebuke his people: it has become a gainful thing to die, a blissful thing to depart and be with Christ.

After death shall come *the judgment*, and in that last great day of judgment the Lord will not be wroth with his people; and if the reading out of all his people's sins before an assembled world must imply a rebuke, then it shall not be done, for he will not rebuke them. In no way shall rebuke come to them. Besides, there are no sins to be charged on his people now, for if they be searched for they shall not be found. Christ has put their iniquities away, and cast them into the depths of the sea. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." His people shall not, even in that awful day, know anything of rebuke from Jehovah's lips. Oh, the blessedness of this glorious promise, which is confirmed to us by the oath of God!

So, then, what should we fear? What indeed? The Lord grant us to be afraid of being afraid! May the Holy Spirit give us grace to be ashamed to blush or doubt, and may we trust him now with a firm confidence that cannot be moved!

These four words, and I have done. If it be so, that God has sworn that he will not be wroth with us, then, first, *believe it.* The inference is clear: Jehovah swears—shall not his children believe? For any man to doubt me is to dishonour me; but for my child to mistrust my oath would be the unkindest cut of all. Believe without hesitation. That is one word.

The next is, *rejoice.* If he will not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee, then be glad. Here is constant theme for song. The nightingale sings in the dark, and so may you. Midst darkest shades with such a word as this your dawning is begun. Rejoice evermore.

The third word is, *be resigned.* If the Lord will not be wroth with you, meekly bear without repining whatever his will ordains. You see the cup is sweetened with love, why do you make wry faces over it? Will you not accept what perfect love proffers? Oh, do not kick against a God so gracious!

Lastly, *impart.* If you have learned this love in your own heart, then tell it out to others. If indeed it be glad tidings to you, tell out the happy message, and say to every sinner you meet with, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"; "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters"; "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." You can prove your knowing this for yourselves, by your desire to make it known to others; and you have need

to doubt whether you truly understand the salvation of the Lord in your own soul, if you feel no inward impulse to make others know the glorious promise of your Lord.

May God bless you, dear friends, by putting this text right into your souls! I can only lay it near the open door of your ears, but the Holy Spirit can place it in the inner casket of your hearts. May he do so at once, for his name's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah liv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—733, 226, 748.

I am unable to write even a line or two to my dear Sermon-readers. I am better, but so weary in brain, and weak in body, that, instead of preaching to others, I must hope that they will be praying for me. So soon as I can compose, I will write a letter to follow each sermon.

Menton, November 30, 1890. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CAMP LAW AND CAMP LIFE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 14TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On a Thursday Evening, before leaving home for his winter's rest.

"For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy; that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee."—Deuteronomy xxiii. 14.

I WILL scarcely allude to the context, which you ought to notice at home, but I must say as much as this: *the Lord cared for the cleanliness of his people while they were in the wilderness*, literally so; and this text is connected with a sanitary regulation of the wisest possible kind. What I admire in it is that God the glorious, the all-holy, should stoop to legislate about such things. Such attention was very necessary for health and even for life, and the Lord, in condescending to it, conveys a severe rebuke to Christian people who have been careless in matters respecting health and cleanliness. Saintly souls should not be lodged in filthy bodies. God takes note of matters which persons who are falsely spiritual speak of as beneath their observation. If the Lord cares for such things, we must not neglect them. But oh, what condescension on his part that his Spirit should dictate to Moses concerning these grosser concerns! I bow before the majesty of a condescension to which nothing is too low.

Observe, also, how it shows us the all-reaching character of the law of Moses. It overshadowed everything; it guided, arranged, restrained, or suggested all the acts of the people under its tutorship. Wherever they were, in their most public or private acts, the people were always under the supervision of the law. By reason of their sinfulness, this holy code of regulations became a yoke which they were not able to bear; still it was a very necessary and salutary law, for which they should have been grateful at all times, since it was for their good in every respect, and tended to bless them both spiritually and physically, socially and religiously.

Dear friends, the great thing that I would bring out at this time is the spiritual lesson of the text—how *the Lord would have his people*

clean in all things. The God of holiness commands and loves purity—purity of all kinds. He saith, "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." Cleanliness of body is sometimes neglected by persons professing godliness; I speak to their shame. It ought not to be possible for grace and dirt to meet in the same person. I must confess I feel a great horror at Christian people who are so dirty that one cannot sit in the same pew with them without nausea. This is the trial of many visitors among poor people who profess religion, that certain of them are not clean in their houses, and in their clothes. Filth may be expected in persons of unclean hearts, but those who have been purified in spirit should do their utmost to be pure in flesh, and clothes, and dwelling. If cleanliness be next to godliness—and I am sure it is—it ought to be observed by those who profess godliness. Does not the same text which says "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience," also say, "and our bodies washed with pure water"? The Christ who redeemed us did not redeem us that we should be covered with filthiness. He has redeemed the body as well as the soul, and he has made it to be the temple of the Holy Ghost; surely we must cleanse his temple, and not suffer it to be defiled. I like the idea of those sailors on board ship, who knew that the ship was going down, and therefore, put on their Sunday's best, that they might die as clean and neat as they could. I would not care to die in filth, or to live in it. A Christian should be clean in all things—in his person, in his house, in his garments, and in his habits. For his own sake, but specially for the sake of others, he should carefully observe sanitary laws, lest he be found guilty of the command which saith, "Thou shalt not kill." Now, if God speaks about this matter of cleanliness, I am sure I may do so, and ought to do so. If anyone is offended let him take a basin of clean water and wash the offence away. If anyone thinks me personal, let him have a personal bath, and so obliterate the mark. If cleanliness is a point which God does not omit, he would not have his servants silent about it.

Still, I pass on from that to the greater lesson of the passage. You will notice that the presence of God in the midst of his people was all-reaching and everywhere. No part of the camp was exempt from God's walking in it. Not merely in the holy place was God, or in the Holy of holies between the cherubim, but he was everywhere in the streets of the canvas city, and in the outskirts thereof. When troops of Israelites went out to war, and consequently cast up temporary camps, they were to remember that God was still walking in the midst of them; and this was to be the great motive power of their lives—the presence of God. The high privilege of being a people near unto Jehovah involved continual watching that nothing might offend his sacred majesty. O sirs, every man, whether a Christian or not, ought to remember that God is everywhere, that there is no escaping from his presence, that even the shades of night furnish no veil under which we may sin with impunity. But as for the chosen, who know the Lord, it is for them to have the lowliest respect unto one so glorious, and yet so graciously near. We may ever pray that

> "Our weaker passions may not dare
> Consent to sin, for God is there."

He is daring indeed who would sin in the face of God. Sin to God's teeth? Approach the throne of the Great King, and be disloyal there? God forbid! The Lord forgive us our audacities! There is a special presence, higher and other than the universal presence of God; and as this is the peculiar privilege of the saints, it should be to them a constant check, or a perpetual spur. The presence of God is to us a check to evil, and a spur to good.

About this presence, and its effects, I am going to speak at this time, as the Spirit of the Lord may help me. Oh, for an anointing from the presence of the Lord!

There are three things which I shall speak of. The first is *an instructive comparison*, which I may draw from this text. The text speaks about the camp of Israel, and that is a comparison which may very aptly set forth the nature of the church of God; for the church is spiritually a camp. Secondly, here is *a special privilege*—"The Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee." And then, thirdly, here is demand for *corresponding conduct*. "Therefore, because the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, therefore shall thy camp be holy, that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee." May this lesson be learned by us all this day!

I. First, then, AN INSTRUCTIVE COMPARISON. The church of God is in many respects comparable to a camp.

It is a camp *for separation*. Men who are encamped are separated from the traders, householders, and others near whom they are tarrying. They are separated especially from the adversaries with whom they are at war. When you come near to a camp, you are challenged by the sentry, for you must not come there without warrant. In war-time a picket is sure to be in your path whichever way you come near to the camp; for during a campaign warriors are a separated people, and must keep themselves so. Such ought the church of God to be. We are crusaders, and are separated from the mass for the service of the cross which we bear on our hearts. We are in an enemy's country, and we must keep ourselves to ourselves very much, or else we shall certainly fail of that holy military discipline which the Captain of our salvation would have us strictly enforce. An attempt is being made, here and there, to make the church like the world, and it has already been carried out by actual experiment. The most ridiculous and even discreditable things are in such cases done in the name of religion, and under cover of church purposes. O friends, this custom comes from the lowest depth, and is full of the cunning of Satan. It will be our destruction if the attempt should succeed. The great object of a Christian should be to separate the church more and more entirely from the world. Our Lord was not of this world, but was crucified without the gate: "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." The reproach to-day, dreaded by feeble minds, is that of being narrow-minded, bigoted, strict, precise. Let us willingly take it up. It is *his* reproach: let us not attempt to escape it. Let it be our resolve that, as far as ever we can, we will be nonconformists to the ways even of worldly Christians. Let us not be conformed to this world, but transformed in the spirit of

our minds. Ours be the holy dissidence of spiritual dissent from evil, the sacred separation of Separatists from error. Are we a camp, dear friends? The question might lead us to judge others: I will put it in the singular. Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb? If so, I must, as a soldier, live in my barracks, or abide in my lines. I must be separated; and I must, as a follower of the Lamb, "go forth unto him without the camp," being determined to live the separated life as he sets it before me. Every true church, then, is a camp for separation.

Next, it is a camp, because *it is on the defensive.* As I have said before, we are marching through an enemy's country. The children of Israel marched through the wilderness, and the Amalekites frequently harassed them, and slew the hindmost of them; as the Amalekites harass us, and, alas! they slay the hindmost of *us.* It is not those that are to the front for their captain, not those who follow close to the standard, nor those who go forth armed in his strength, that fall by the enemy. Those who play about in the rear, who gather up the stones of the desert, and hoard them up as a treasure—it is these upon whom the Amalekites pounce. Yet their arrows are far flying, and none of us is safe from the enemy, except as the Lord keeps us. Therefore, we must go about armed at all times. I heard say of a certain clergyman, that he told his bishop, when he went to a ball, that he was "off duty"; but his bishop very properly replied, "When is a clergyman off duty?" I put the same question to a Christian, When are you off duty? Never. The policeman wears a badge on his arm to show that he is on duty: you wear nothing upon your arm, it is upon your whole self. Buried with the Lord in baptism, the sacred watermark is on you from head to foot, the token that henceforth you are dead to the world, and are alive in newness of life. You cannot strip yourself of so comprehensive a distinction; it is impossible to erase it, it is an indelible token, and if you are false to it, then you are traitors indeed. If you are living as you should do, you are living unto Christ, always and ever, in every place, and at all times. You are to serve God in your enjoyments, as well as in your employments; in your leisure as much as in your labour. You are to serve him, not only in what is mistakenly called his house, but also in your own house. Ay, and you yourself are to be the temple of the living God always. Brethren, we are soldiers at all times, and must never doff our regimentals. We must keep rank, and march in serried order, for every day is a battle to the church of God. There is no truce between the church and error, between the saint and sin. If there be a truce, it is an unholy one, and must be broken, for God himself has proclaimed eternal war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Our condition is one of warfare, and nothing else, until the last great victory shall crush the serpent's head. The church is a camp, for it is on the defensive.

It is a camp, too, especially, because *it is always assailing the powers of darkness.* It is carrying the war into the enemy's territory. That, no doubt, is the special intention of the words of our text. Read the ninth verse, "When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing." Learn, then, that we are to go

forth against the enemy. It is not for the church of God to protect her own borders, and think, "This is enough"; she must go forth to conquer fresh territory for her Lord. There used to be in our churches too much of contentedness with isolation and inactivity. The hymn went up from a quiet, do-nothing assembly—

> "We are a garden walled around,
> Chosen and made peculiar ground,
> A little spot enclosed by grace
> Out of the world's wide wilderness."

We dare not feel content to let the wilderness remain what it is; we may not give up vast regions to the dragon and the owl. No, no, dear friends, we are going to break up more ground, and make the little spot into a far wider space; and if the garden be walled around, we hope to build a wall round many more acres of ground, and so enlarge the garden of the Great King. The church of God is like fire, and you cannot say to fire, "You must burn comfortably at the corner of that haystack, and never think of going any farther." "No," says the fire, "I will burn it all down." "But there are farm buildings yonder: do not touch those sheds and barns." The fierce fire is insatiable; it never stops while there is anything to be consumed. Even so a true church has within herself an ambition for her Lord that his kingdom may be extended everywhere; and that ambition is as insatiable as that of Alexander, which a conquered world could scarce content. If there were only one sinner left, it would be worth the while of all the saved millions to continue to pray day and night for that one sinner, and to set all its tongues moving to tell to that one sinner the gospel of Christ. Alas, we are a very long way off from having a lone soul to watch over! A few are saved, and untold millions are perishing. Feeble are the lamps which as yet are kindled, the vast proportion of the world is wrapt in tenfold night. We are as yet only a handful of corn on the top of the mountains, and our desire should be to grow till "the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth." We have a world to conquer, and we cannot afford to loiter. We have a kingdom to set up for the Lord of hosts, and we must not sleep, for the adversaries of the Lord are raging. We are an army, sworn to war against the Canaanites of error and sin, to cast down their walled cities, to break their idols, and to cut down their groves. The church of God is the great army of peace, purity, liberty, love: she wars against war, she wars against sin, she wars against oppression, she wars against falsehood, uncleanness, intemperance, unrighteousness; and her fight has only yet begun. Do you not feel, my brethren, dwelling in this wicked city of London, that our appropriate description is a camp?

And next, dear friends, the church of God is a camp because *we are on the march.* A camp is pitched in one spot for temporary purposes, for the army is moving on to-morrow, and then the camp will be in another place. The Israelites, especially, were not *dwelling* in the desert; they were only marching through it into the land that God had promised to them. It is well for us to recollect that we are

ourselves in a movable camp, marching, marching onward, marching forward; but ever marching and moving. This is not our rest. We are not at home: we are on foreign travel. Alas! I am afraid that we do not realize this, but are like the children of Israel, who took forty years in the wilderness to perform a journey which, I suppose, might have been accomplished in forty days or less. It was not far, after all, from Egypt to Canaan; we should think nothing of it as a journey now; and even for that great mass of people, who necessarily travelled slowly, it needed not to have been a long passage; but they took forty years over it, because they marched this way and that way, in endless mazes lost, wandering rather than journeying towards a definite spot. Do you not think that a great many Christian people are practising the same method of motion without progress? Have you not seen some of them, like the King of France, march up a hill and down again? Is not that the way with most? Bravely they lift the lance, and hold the shield, and rush forth to the fight. They ride round the enemy, and take stock of him, and come home to tell what they have seen; and that is all they do! Multitudes are for ever playing at being Christians. Do you not note their childish see-saw, up and down, up and down; but their movement leaves them no higher than at the first. God save us from this! The camp must go onward. Thus saith the Lord, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." We ought to be advancing in grace, in knowledge, in earnestness, in holiness, in usefulness, and if not, we scarcely realize the figure of a camp.

Yet, once more, no doubt a camp, as formed *for temporary purposes*, was a token of the church; for although the church stands still and abides, yet in her individual members she is subject to the same law of decay, and death, and change, as the rest of the world. Soon shall the camp cease; and the soldiers become citizens, and the tents be exchanged for mansions. The church is militant upon the earth for a season only. We are here to-day and gone to-morrow. O brethren, we are at present rather a camp than a city; for we pass away, and our brethren also, as the days fly by. I recollect this church and congregation six-and-thirty years ago; and my brother William Olney* behind me will recollect it too; but neither he nor I can recall all the names of our brother soldiers who were with us then. They are gone from us at our Captain's call. I say not that they are lost, for they are not so; but they are lost to us for present aid. You cannot say that a thing is lost when you know where it is, and we know where they are; but they are not here, and we sadly miss them. Others have sprung up, but a whole generation has passed away. Part of our legion have forded the dividing stream,

> And we are to the margin come,
> And soon expect to die.

To us also there remaineth a rest, but we recollect that here we have no continuing city, we seek one to come. We endeavour to make the camp as comfortable as the desert will permit; but it can never

* Alas! my brother W. Olney has himself since crossed the stream.

be a home. When you are in the East, your tent-bed awaits you; you sleep well, you wake up, there is your breakfast; but very soon they roll up the tent, and pull up the poles, and put the whole thing on camels, and you are again homeless on the burning sand. You can never reckon upon anything like steadfast abiding in one place when you are following camp life. Such is the life of the believer: camp life is his lot, and it is well for him to be prepared to rough it.

Here we are in a tabernacle, that is, a tent which is to be taken down; but we are going to a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. We have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, and we are wending our way thither; but, as yet, we are like Bedouin Arabs, or like our own soldiers on a campaign, when they have no permanent barracks, but abide in tents.

We remember very sadly, that, when rough men get into camp—and soldiers, as a rule are rough enough—they think that they may do anything. In this respect the camp of God is to differ from all other camps, as much as white from black. To this day it is a sort of popular error that a soldier may indulge himself in uncleanness, and be less blamable than other people. I have heard the remark, "The young man is in the army; and what can you expect of him?" But God's people are to be soldiers, and theirs is to be camp life; but their camp is holy, and so must each one of them be. Thus saith the Lord, "When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing." "The Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy; that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee." A camp of angels should not be more holy than a church of saints among whom the Lord God hath taken up his abode.

Thus much upon the very instructive figure of the text.

II. Secondly, I come to notice A SPECIAL PRIVILEGE. The text mentions a privilege specially promised to Israel, but I am sure, to a very high and real degree, enjoyed by ourselves. "The Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee."

By this walking is intended *a special presence of love*. The Lord is present in his church in a higher sense than in the world. The Lord walks in the midst of his church as a man takes pleasure in the walks of his garden. The church is the garden of the Lord, his paradise. "His delights are with the sons of men." He looks on this one, and on that—all plants of his own right-hand planting: he looks to see where the knife is wanted, that he may prune the vine; or where refreshment is wanted, that he may water the roots. The Lord, with unutterable care, is in the midst of his church. Remember how he says, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." If you want to find God on earth, you must look among his chosen. Where is a father most at home but with his children? God hath said, "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." While Israel was a dweller in tents the ark of the covenant was among them, the token of the Lord's presence; and in his warring church the great Captain of

the host is ever lovingly near. Hear how he gives the assurance, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." There are special lines of love to his own, which make us sometimes cry, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world!" But so it is our Lord Jesus walks up and down our ranks, and sees our order or disorder, our courage or our cowardice; and this is the best reason why we should behave ourselves aright. He loves us, and we must not grieve him. See the force of this argument, "The Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp; therefore shall thy camp be holy."

God is present in the camp of his people *with a special presence of observation.* He sees all things; but his eyes are, in the first place, fixed on his church. With burning glance he searches the very heart of professors. I tremble while I speak this word. It is often bowing me to the dust. With regard to the ungodly, I may say of them, "The times of this ignorance God winketh at"; but to his people he says, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." There is a discipline in the house of God which is carried on, not by church officers, nor by the church itself, but by the providence of God. Men die before their time, and others are sick who might be well; sick, I mean, through ill behaviour in the church of God. Thus saith the apostle: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." If you are not my child I have nothing to say about your behaviour: I leave you to your own father. But if you are my boy, my child at home, I must speak to you, I must correct you, for I bear a responsibility towards you. So it is with God. He will bear much from the ungodly which he will not endure from his own people. Here is a text which I would like to wrap up in my heart: "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." That wondrous love of his must have jealousy linked with it. Our God loves us so much, so entirely, with all the infinity of his Godhead, that if we do not love him in return, and yield the holy fruits of love, he is grieved and angry. "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." See, then, the argument: if it be so, that God is specially watchful over his church, let thy camp be holy. The Lord cries, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." It is not for Jehovah's camp to be fouled. He would not have any putrid matter, anything offensive, remain within the camp literally; and spiritually he will have us keep all filthiness away from his church. He will have us just, true, pure, sincere, holy; and if we are not so, his anger will burn like fire. Lord, have mercy upon us! Christ, have mercy upon us! What more can we say?

Again, dear friends, the peculiar privilege of Israel is to have *a special presence of salvation.* "The Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp to deliver thee." God is with his people, to help them in their times of trouble, to rescue them out of danger, to answer their cries in their necessity, to save them in the hour of temptation. He is with us to deliver us in all things in which we require deliverance. Have we not found him so? I could touch this string with no feeble or wavering hand. This very week I have found him with me, to deliver me in many things—many things that seemed

to lay me low, matters which concerned the Lord's church. Trouble was there; but the Lord was there also. Oh, what a blessing it is! "The Lord is there." Have you any troubles and difficulties, dear friend, and are you a child of God? Do you belong to Christ? Well, the Lord is with his people to deliver them. Should not this be a grand argument why the camp should be holy, for if he hears our prayers, we are bound to obey his precepts? If he will give us our will, let his will be done on earth, even as it is in heaven. God help us so to do!

And, next, the Lord is with the camp of his people, not only to deliver them, but as *a special presence for victory*. He routs their enemies, and gives his saints success. All the hope that the church has of doing any good in the world must come from the Lord's being in the midst of her. If any error is to be trampled down as straw for the dunghill, if any sinner is to be snatched like a lamb from between the jaws of the lion, if any dark neighbourhood is to be enlightened, it must be because God is with his people. "Without me ye can do nothing." This word is most true. It is he, and he alone, that can give up our enemies before us. Very well, then, let the camp be holy, lest we lose that presence, and he be gone.

Once more, it is *a special presence in covenant*. "The Lord *thy* God." Listen to that word—"Jehovah thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp to deliver thee." The living God is our God. Men have many gods, even in England—gods of their own making; but my God is the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I believe in the Old Testament God, who is the same as the God of the New Testament. I abhor the idea of a new Godhead. Jehovah is one and the same to me. But oh, if he be our God by special covenant, if he has taken us to be his people, and we have taken him to be our God, it is most delightful, but it involves us in a grave responsibility to be a holy people. If we can say,

> "'Tis done, the great transaction's done.
> I am my Lord's, and he is mine,"

then let us be holy, and let our whole camp be holy. Otherwise our vows are a fiction, our professions are a lie. Do we wish to provoke the Lord, and to vex his Spirit? The Lord save us from this evil!

See, then, the special privilege. I have already told you what it involves.

III. So now I have only to dwell for a minute or two upon the last point a little more distinctly—A CORRESPONDING CONDUCT. "Therefore shall thy camp be holy; that he see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee."

Observe, then, that *this rule, that the camp be holy, applies to the commonest places wherein we are found*. "Therefore shall thy camp be holy." As I have already said, men generally think that they may take great license in a camp; but the Lord says, "Therefore shall thy camp be holy." When you are out for a holiday, be holy. When you say, "Now we have one or two friends coming to the house, and we will indulge ourselves somewhat," be holy; and let the

conversation and the entertainment be holy. Let not only the church-meeting be holy; but let the family gathering be holy, whether at Christmas, or on a Bank holiday, or at another time. Let the common meals be holy, no excess or murmuring being tolerated. Let the board and the bed be holy. Let the body and the mind be holy. Let the commonest act you do be holiness to the Lord. Let the bells upon the horses ring out only this note, "Holiness unto the Lord." "Holiness becometh thine house, O God"; but holiness becometh also all the houses of thy people. Holiness is the ordained livery of a servant of God, and he that does not wear this garment has disgraced himself and his master. He is wearing, in fact, the livery of the King's enemies. Let him mind what he is at. If my memory does not deceive me, when Oliver Cromwell was first contending with the king, the soldiers who joined him were mostly gentlemen-farmers, and they wore their own buff jerkins; and as many on the other side were dressed much the same, mistakes were made; and, in a rough-and-tumble fight, they did not know cavalier from roundhead. So Cromwell said, upon a certain occasion, that all his soldiers must be dressed in a certain colour, and not a man should be in his troop who did not come by such a day with such a coat on. Well, you say, why should they wear uniform? Some of them did not like it; but his orders were peremptory, that not a man should be with him if he did not wear the regulation dress, since by their common array they knew each other, and could not be mistaken in a scuffle. Holiness is the white raiment of the believer; be sure that you put it on, because, otherwise, we shall not know you, and the world will not know you, and you will be mistaken for an enemy. I am afraid you will be treated as having gone over to the enemy, if we catch you in the usurper's black instead of the king's white. The Holy Spirit arrays you in the white raiment of holiness, that you may shine out bright and clear and distinct before the sons of men.

But now, notice this, too. While this holiness pertained to their commonest things, it was also ordered that *every unclean thing was to be put from them*. "That he may see no unclean thing in thee." This is an awful text. I will not preach about it, but I will just repeat it to you again: "That *he* may see no unclean thing in thee." Ah, me! We often see unclean things in ourselves, do we not? Yes; but we often overlook much uncleanness, and do not notice it because our eyes are dim. We have lost, perhaps, the spiritual nostril that would smell the unclean thing. Our senses have become perverted by the foul world in which we live. But then, think of this—the pure and holy God—the thrice holy God—he speaks of himself in this sort, "That *he* see no unclean thing in thee." Brothers, sisters, what a house-cleaning this calls for! What hard sweeping this requires—that "*he* see no unclean thing in thee"! Remember, the pith of that text concerning the Paschal Lamb lies in God's sight of the sprinkled blood. Notice, "When *I* see the blood, I will pass over you." So here the very force of the text lies—"that *he* see no unclean thing in thee." Oh, for grace and watchfulness to keep clear of touching the unclean thing! Let us come continually to the washing-place—even to the fountain opened. Let us beseech the cleansing Spirit to operate

as with fire, and burn his purifying way through and through our souls, that in the church of God the Lord may not see any unclean thing in any one of us.

Note well *the fearful warning which is added.* If there be in the camp an unclean thing tolerated and delighted in, and *he* see it—if it becomes conspicuous and grievous to *him*, then the worst consequences will follow—"Lest *he* turn away from thee." Oh! what would happen to us if the Lord were to turn away from us as a church? Horror takes hold on me at the thought. The pastor will die in due time: that is a small matter, for the Lord can send another. But if the Lord were to pass away from us, what an overwhelming desolation! Ichabod would be written in large capitals across this house if the Lord were gone. And yet my wonder often is that he has not gone, when I remember the unclean things that I have to see and mourn over. I see very little compared with what the Lord sees, but I see enough to make me tremble. The Lord sees much about us that grieves him, even when we think there is nothing amiss. Let us pray that the Lord do not go from us. I invite you earnestly to pray that during my absence God may keep all the camp in holy working order; that he may see no unclean thing, and may not turn away from his people. O Lord, in thy love bear with us, and abide with us evermore!

I have done; but there is a little fragment that follows my text which I want some of you to get before I go. Read this. This follows the text. It is a curious thing that it should follow the text. I think that it is put here on purpose for me to have a word for the sinner before I have done. "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee: he shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him." I wonder whether any runaway has come into our place of worship to-night. Certainly there are some of Satan's slaves here. I would recommend you to run away from the devil, and not give him a moment's notice. Flee from his service directly. There is no getting away from sin except by instantaneous flight. Run for it! Run at once. Steal away to Jesus. Do not stop to think twice. The prodigal said, "I will arise, and go to my father"; and he arose and went to his father. Deliberating about it, and giving notice, never answers anybody's purpose in the matter of repentance unto life. Instantaneous flight is your wisdom. Run away in a twinkling. If you do run away, and get among the Lord's people, we will never give you up to your old master. He may come here after you; but we know him, and are not to be deceived by him in this matter. He has come here after many; but we have not given up any of his runaways, and by God's grace, we will never part with *you*, but defy the man-catcher to take you away. Jesus says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"; and so you see he will harbour you, and not return you to your Master. There were slaves in Moses' day, but if they ran away nobody ever sent them back to their master; and therefore it was not much of slavery after all. The devil has many slaves; but if they run away to Jesus, they shall never be sent back.

Come, then, dare to be free from Satan's power. Strike for liberty! Your tyrant lord has no right to you. I know you sold yourself, but you were not your own to sell; you were stolen goods. The devil can have no more property in you than you had in yourself, and that was nothing, for you are not your own. Fly away, poor hunted dove, to Jesus' wounds; and when once you get there, the hawk cannot reach you. Safe in the Rock of Ages you shall dwell as a dove in the clefts. Though I have dealt faithfully with the uncleanness of professing believers, I now invite the vilest and the foulest to come to Jesus for safety and liberty.

"There is a fountain fill'd with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."

Ransomed sinners may dwell among us, in whatsoever place they shall choose. Neither will we oppress them with hard questions or irksome duties, but we will bind them to be free, as we are ourselves bound to liberty, in the name of the Lord our God. God bless you, dear friends, and during my absence may you be fed with the finest of the wheat! May the blessing of the Lord rest upon you! If we do not meet again in this wilderness below, may we meet, when camp life is over, in the city above, to go no more out for ever! The blessing of the Lord rest on you evermore!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Peter ii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—668, 745, 87.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

BELOVED FRIENDS,—Up to this date I have had no opportunity to enjoy rest, but have been at first suffering, and now slowly recovering. This, however, is not lost time, if I have but grace to improve the trial. Let us always seek sanctification through affliction rather than escape from it.

I have no question that there is great wisdom in the Lord's laying aside his instruments. It is for his own glory, for thereby he shows that he is not in need of them; and it is for their humbling, for hereby they learn how deep is their need of him. The uninterrupted reception of blessing through one channel might breed in our foolish hearts an idolatrous confidence in the means; and therefore there comes a break in the use of that means, that the Lord may be the more tenderly remembered. We may be sure that, if the Lord dries up a cistern, it is because he would have us fly to the fountain of inexhaustible strength.

I desire to rejoice that, in all these thirty-six years, with sicknesses so frequently upon me, I have never been compelled to drop either the weekly sermon or the monthly magazine. There has either been an interval of power, or I have been a little forward with the work when the stroke has laid me aside. May I not say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me"? Having received help of God, I continue unto this day; and I shall abide in my calling so long as there is work for me to do for my Lord.

I send my loving Christian salutations to all my hearers and readers, with earnest request for their prayers for myself personally, and for a blessing upon the sermons, and all the work at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

The times are out of course; the walls of human confederacies are crumbling; the fashion of this world is passing away; "but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Yours in loving service for our Lord Jesus,

Menton, December 6, 1890. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ZEDEKIAH; OR, THE MAN WHO CANNOT SAY "*NO.*'

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 21ST, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, March 30th, 1890.

"Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you."—Jeremiah xxxviii. 5.

"PUT not your trust in princes." Zedekiah professed to be a friend to Jeremiah; but when the princes sought permission to put the prophet to death, Zedekiah's friendship was not worth much. He said, "He is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you." Instead of protecting his friend and adviser, he gave him over at once, and left him as a lamb at the mercy of wolves.

It seems very natural for men to trust in men; and yet the Scripture warns us that, "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." He that makes a mortal man his confidence, will find that his anchor has no grip. Even good men are but broken reeds, and cannot bear the strain of the day of trouble; while the bad are like sharp spears, that prick the man who dares to lean upon them. But, if we cannot trust in men, we think that surely we may trust in *princes.* If honour were banished from all the rest of the world, it ought to find a home in the breasts of kings. Great men, noble men, men of renown, men of high standing—may we not trust in them? Brethren, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes"; for princes are but men, and sometimes hardly that. Princes are not always the truest of men: they are seldom the best of men to trust to. Many have had to say at the end of life what Wolsey is represented as saying to Sir William Kingston, "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, he would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies." If "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown," certainly, uneasy is the heart which rests on the wearer of a diadem. Trust you in God, and you have trusted in the true King, "the King immortal, invisible." Trust you in the Christ of God, and you have trusted in the only prince who

can never falter, fail, or forget. I think that is clearly a lesson of the text. We all know some one who to us is as a prince; let us not rest too much on wealthy uncle, or generous friend, or capable patron; but let our trust be ever in the Lord alone. Had Jeremiah been trusting in Zedekiah, he would have been sorrowfully deceived. Yet this is not the lesson that I am going to teach at this time.

Zedekiah was a gentleman of a sort wonderfully common nowadays. A good-natured, easy man; his nobles could get anything they liked from him. He would not act amiss of his own self, but he would follow the lead of others, wherever that might lead him. He had a great respect for the prophet; he liked to visit him, and know what message he had received from God. He did not wish to have it known that he did consult him; but still he liked to steal away in private, and have a talk with the man of God. He much respected the man so sorrowful, and yet so heroic. But when the princes came round him, though he was an autocratic king, and could have snuffed out those gentlemen at once, yet half-a-dozen of them, all very glib of speech, most easily persuaded him. He did not want to have any bother: he would do anything for a quiet life. "The king is not he that can do any thing against you." As much as to say: "I cannot say 'No' to you, if you wish it. I am sorry: I think you are wrong, but I will not insist upon my own idea. If you wish it, although I am a king, and perhaps ought not to be so yielding, yet I so much wish to please everybody that I cannot refuse you anything. You may take the prophet and, if you like, you may put him into a dungeon, where he will die. I think you are too hard on a good man, for whom I have a great respect; but at the same time, gentlemen, I am not a man that can stand out against you; and so take him, and do as you please." This is that king Zedekiah: he does not rule, but is ruled by the princes whom he ought to command. "Oh," says one, "you do not mean to insinuate that we have any Zedekiahs about now?" I shall not insinuate anything, but boldly declare that these soft, molluscous beings make up a large proportion of the population, and I think it is highly probable that some of them are here now. I shall be very glad if what I say should make them feel much ashamed, and should cause them to cry to God to give them new hearts and right spirits. It shall not be my fault if they do not feel their seat grow hard, and the house grow warm. I would fain make them pray to God to put some kind of moral backbone into them; so that, when they know the right, they may stand up for it, and may not weakly yield to the persuasions of those who tempt them. May the Holy Spirit be here to convince men of sin in this matter!

I. I am going, first of all, to DESCRIBE THE LIKE OF THIS MAN ZEDEKIAH; that I may deal plainly with such.

This softness of character takes different shapes, but it is the same base metal, the same worthless dross, in every case.

In some it takes the form of *enquiring into what religion is fashionable when they settle down in a district.* They have a pretty good idea of what truth is. They were taught it by their parents; they have read it in God's Word; they have made up their minds with some distinctness as to what is the correct thing according to Holy Scripture; but

they waive their judgment, and prepare to compromise. You see, if you want to get on in business, the best thing is to join with those religious people who are the wealthiest, and most respectable, and fashionable. If you have prospered in business, and have saved money —well, the girls want to be married, and the family requires to get into "society," whatever that may mean; so the best thing is not to enquire, "Who preaches the gospel in this district?" but, "Where will it be most for our commercial advantage, or best for our position in society, and most eligible for the girls?" and there let us go. Children of Judas, thus you sell your Master for forty pieces of silver, and perhaps for less! Iscariot's tribe is a large one. Not that they want to be wrong, they would prefer to be right: not that they wish to take up with false doctrine, they would much rather take up with right doctrine: but, you see, they must be "respectable." Sound doctrine in preference, but good society at any price. They cannot be expected to go with the poorest and the least educated class of people, they must be respectable; and so, when they are asked to worship in a fine architectural erection, though they know that it is not where their souls will profit, they will make no bones about doctrine or practice, but go at once. By their conduct they say, "I am by no means so bound up with any religious views as to lose anything for their sake. I am not one that can refuse a kind invitation from people of fashion." Did you never meet with such folk? I have met them frequently. I know that soft fellow, Zedekiah: I have seen him a great many times, and I have no very great liking for him. Is he here before me? My dear sir, be not offended with your own portrait.

Another one is of this kind. He is a Christian: at least he hopes that he is; and, on examining his own heart, he trusts that he is; but *he has never made any profession:* he never intends to do so, because, you see, if you make a profession, then you are distinctly coming out from the world, and declaring yourself to be on the side of Christ and holiness, and a great deal will be expected of you. This may involve you in a good deal of trouble. Is there not an easier path than this? The strait way, the narrow way, is described in the Word of God as "the way which leadeth unto life"; but can you not keep as near the way as possible without going into it? Can you not travel along on the other side of the hedge? The grass is very nice there. The primroses are coming up. You can look over the fence, and keep the high road in view, so as not to wander far from the track? Why should you choose an unpopular way, which will cost you many a friendship, and a good deal of enjoyable company? If you openly follow the narrow way, you will be pointed at: people will expect you to be so very careful and so very holy, and this will cost a deal of painful self-denial. Why should you expose yourself to all that trouble, when there are so many friends on the sheltered side of the hedge who assure you that their path will lead to the same end? It is not quite what it ought to be; still, God is very merciful, and you may hope to come out right in the long run, if you are careful to pick your way, and do not get into the worst of the ditches. Is it not always a good thing to take a short cut? Well, I used to think so once; but now, whenever I am in the country, I always

scrupulously avoid short cuts; for they almost always get you up to your ankles in mud, and often land you further off than you were when you started. And you may depend upon it that, in this life, the man who thinks that he is not going to make a profession, but will go to heaven secretly by the new cut, will find himself, before long, much farther off from God and Christ than he ever thought to be. The way to heaven, according to Scripture, is, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"; and "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder." It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The inward faith, and the public avowal of it, must never be divided. Do you dare to remove even a linch-pin from the gospel chariot? Mind what you are at! O ye cowards, ye think to make a new way to heaven—to make the walk more pleasing to your taste, and more gratifying to your pride; but you will ruin your souls. Do you hope to be allowed to sneak into heaven by a back door! Take heed to yourselves, lest you be deceived in this. This Zedekiah—I know that he is here to-night—means to join the church any time within the next sixty years; and he has always meant that for the last thirty years that I have known him. I wonder whether he will live till the time comes! I am in great fear about him, and I pray him to consider what is now said, and no longer be ashamed of Christ.

Another form of Zedekiah is not uncommon. *It is the man who is on both sides.* A Christian? Yes, by all means. He takes a class in the Sunday-school. "Certainly, sir. Would you not have me active in the cause of Christ?" Of course. He talks to others about the necessity of being found in Christ, and of the excellence of Christian endeavour. We like this young man. But to-morrow night there will be an entertainment of a loose character, and he will be asked to go. Will our virtuous young gentleman yield to the invitations of his worldly friends? Assuredly he will; for he is like putty, and you can mould him at will. "Well," he says, "you know we must not be too strict"; and he goes. Another time there will be sung, in his presence, a song which is a little lewd; and others laugh, and he laughs, too. He says that he did not quite like it; yet I do not hear any difference between his laugh and the laugh of others. He is a gentleman who is "Hail fellow, well met!" with any company that he gets into. A most genial man, is he not? He never raises questions: he is far from squeamish, for that might land him in difficulties. "The king is not he that can do any thing against you": he will do everything for you. He holds with the hare. Poor thing, it is a shame to hunt so timid a creature! But his sympathy is not worth much, for he runs with the hounds as fast as any dog among them, and he would be glad to get the hare by the nape of the neck if he could do it and not be seen. Do you not know the gentleman? You know him, but you do not esteem him. Who could? To me he is a frequent sorrow. God deliver us from duplicity! Of all things that must be accursed in his sight, the chief must be this—to pretend respect to our holy faith, and then to live in constant opposition to it. "If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him"; but do not attempt to worship Jehovah and Baal at the same altar,

and bring them the same sacrifice; for this must not be. No man can serve two masters.

Then, we have another class of Zedekiahs who are of a better sort, but none too good. I trust that they wish to be true at heart, but *they are very weak, and apt to yield.* If they live in a godly family they will be pleased to be there, and they will be happy and develop into something very good in its way. But if, in the order of providence, they should be cast in a family where there is no religion, certainly they will not attempt to alter the state of things, except it be in the mildest half-hearted manner. The family will be still without religion though they are there. And if they happen to move to a circle openly opposed to godliness—well, it will grieve them very much at first, and they will be rather restless. It will not grieve them quite so much by-and-by; and after a while they will themselves become as much opposed to the thing they now admire as the rest of the folks. O dear friends, we have a number of Christians—I will not condemn them—but they are very feeble. They give way in the day of temptation. They cannot stand alone: false doctrine, cleverly spoken, carries them clean away. These are the prey of wolves in sheep's clothing. They have no stamina, no backbone, no inward root. Be you not of this sort. Oh, pray every morning, "Lead us not into temptation"; and when you have breathed that prayer to God, add the other, "But deliver us from evil." If we must be tempted, let us not fall under the temptation. In these perilous days we want men who have put on the whole armour of God. It is not every child that can wear armour. We want men strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, who, having put on armour, are not afraid to come to the front of the battle where the arrows fly thickest; for they know that their armour is mail of proof, and will throw off all the poisoned darts of the enemy. But, alas! we have many whom we love, and for whom we pray, who are so apt to yield, so ready to give way, that they fall in battle at the very first assault of the deceiver. They get with persons of cunning character and commanding mind, and they fly like feathers in the wind, having no power to resist even the breath of a childish foe.

Thus I have described Zedekiah in four of the forms which he commonly takes. If the cap fits any one of you, pray wear it. If I have made a photograph of you, put it in the album of your meditation, and look at it till you loathe your own likeness.

II. Now, very briefly, let me SEARCH OUT THE CAUSE OF THIS ERROR, which spoils the character of Zedekiah. May be, we may put our finger on an evil which may be cured by grace.

It is not always the same in everybody, but *with some there is a general softness of character.* I do not say that they have a soft place in their head. Possibly I may not say the whole truth if I suggest that they have a soft place in their heart; but they are soft altogether: fine material for a potter to work upon. You can cast them into any shape you choose. Remember one whom Mr. Bunyan graphically describes. His name was Pliable. Evangelist and Christian told him about the Celestial City. "Yes, yes," Pliable said. Oh, yes, he would go to the Celestial City. Of course he would go to the Celestial City.

He liked the idea. It was a beautiful thing to start for heaven and glory, and escape from the City of Destruction, which was to be burned up. Of course, he quite agreed with his friends, and he would start with them on pilgrimage. He went on with his companion, Christian, till they came to the Slough of Despond. Suddenly in they went, up to their necks in the mire. Christian made desperate efforts to get out on the farther shore, nearest to the city that he sought; but Pliable had never reckoned upon any such floundering: if there was to be a slough, he thought it would not be so deep as this one, and that the mud would not be quite so foul. Finding it to be a horrible bog, he turned round, and as he was not very far from the spot at which he entered, he scrambled out on the side nearest home; and as he climbed the bank, he said that, as far as he was concerned, whoever liked might have the Celestial City; but he would not venture again into such a slough, even though fifty Celestial Cities should tempt him before, and fifty Destructions should threaten him behind. So we have people about that are fluid: nothing in their character is substantial. I will tell you what has often happened in this Tabernacle. A man has come into this place and stood in the aisle, hating the very thought of true religion, with a heart like a flint; and when I have been busy with my hammer, by God's grace I have come down on that flint, and the flint has gone to pieces in a minute, broken to shivers. But others are here who are india-rubber men, and when I am hammering they yield to each blow. I can mould them as I please; but when the sermon is done, they always get back into the old shape. There is a vast difference between the honest obstinacy of the one, and the trivial submission of the other. Without any gracious yielding of the heart to the force of divine truth many encourage us for a time, but deceive us in the end. Zedekiah talks very pleasantly and hopefully, but betrays those who seek his good, for he is unstable, and not to be depended on.

Another reason for this softness is *a selfish love of ease.* Sluggards are by no means an extinct race. Many will pay any tax if they may but dwell at ease. Beware of this in your personal character. A man says, "I admit that I ought to have spoken right out, and denounced evil." "Why did you not?" "Well, I did not like." The next time that he is asked to do a wrong thing, he will yield, and turn with his company like a vane in the wind. He knows that he ought to resist, but he does not; and why not? "Well, you see, I do not like offending people." Lazy, lazy lover of yourself! That is all it comes to. His wish to please his fellows is only a phase of his desire to please himself. The coward wishes to save his precious carcase from trouble, and let himself go sauntering along the road of pleasure without distressing exertion, so he says, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Well, yes, sir," to everybody. He destroys his soul for the sake of taking things easy. Do I not speak to a great many here who are of this kind? Some are sharp, decisive—too sharp, perhaps; but they have minds, and mean what they say. Others are always afraid to speak the truth unless it is popular. Contending for the truth is a thing they cannot endure, for it involves too much effort. They are especially afraid to say that little word "No," a word which I strongly

recommend to every young man. "No" is one of the most useful words in the world. A man is more than half-educated when he can say "No" distinctly. He has not much more to learn after that. There are great men and wise men, so called, who cannot say, "No." They say, "N—n—no," perhaps. They get the word out without meaning it; or, possibly, in the middle of their attempt at saying it, they break down, and end with the admission, "I am not one that can say you nay." Thus they copy Zedekiah when he said, "The king is not he that can do any thing against you." Dear friends, peace at any price is peace bought too dearly. Will you fling away your souls, your heaven, your all, for the sake of ease? Selfish love of a quiet life, what a folly thou art!

Some others, I must say, are, if possible, even more contemptible than these. *They are cowards.* I will not run the risk of being attacked by an angry hearer, when the sermon is over, for calling him a coward; but I do believe that such people are about, and that some of them are here. Men that would face a dragon, or go up to the cannon's mouth, I have known to be afraid of a woman, or of some idle reprobate whose opinion was not worth the breath he used in speaking it. You remember how Peter was terribly put out because a maid said to him, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee." A maid! What was it to Peter what that maidservant thought about him? But poor Peter was all in a heat, and was so frightened that he denied that he even knew his Lord. Do not condemn *his* weakness, but remember your own. Have not some of you been frightened by a silly maid, or by a foolish boy? Are there not some here that have thought about eternal life, and would long ago have given serious consideration to their soul's affairs, but they are afraid of—well, I will not mention him; you know who it is that you are afraid of? But so it is the world over. I have known a man afraid of his daughter; I have known many more daughters afraid of their father; many a wife afraid of her husband, and some husbands afraid of their wives, their employers, their brothers, their friends. Soldiers in the barrack-room are often fearful of their messmates; and workmen down at the shop are alarmed because there is one sharp fellow in the room who is an infidel, and would give them no peace if they made an avowal of their faith. It would demean a great many if we were to expose their petty cowardices. Are you not ashamed of yourselves, if it be so?

The bottom of all is, however, that when a man is thus timid about doing right, and can be easily persuaded to do wrong, there is *a want of the fear of God in him.* He that fears God is under no necessity to fear anybody else. True godliness infuses courage into the heart: in this respect also "perfect love casteth out fear." If you have learned to tremble before the great, almighty, living God, you have ceased to tremble before a living man: I must correct myself—before a *dying* man; for in very truth life is in God, but man is a creature that will die and perish like the moth. "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker?" If we had a sense of God's presence everywhere, we should not dare consent to sin, whoever it was that bade us do so. We should be like

the three holy children who stood for God. "Do you see that burning fiery furnace?" "Yes, we see it; but we also see the living God." "It shall be heated seven times hotter," said Nebuchadnezzar. "Do you hear that?" They hear the furious threat of the despot, but they also hear a voice which Nebuchadnezzar did not hear—the voice of God bidding them serve him, and strengthening them to do so. I remember in the life of my dear friend, Mr. Oncken, of Hamburg, when he began to baptize people in the Alster contrary to the law. He was brought up before the burgomaster, and that worthy magistrate put him several times in prison. At last Mr. Burgomaster said, "I tell you what it is, Mr. Oncken; the law must be obeyed. Do you see that little finger of mine? As long as that little finger will move, I will put you down in your illegal baptisms." "Well," said my brave old friend, "Mr. Burgomaster, with all respect to you, I do see that little finger of yours; but do you see that great hand of God? I am afraid that you do not see it as I do. But, as long as that great hand of God is with me, you cannot put me down." I opened Mr. Oncken's chapel in Hamburg some years afterwards, and I had a most respectable audience gathered together to hear me preach the gospel, and in the centre of that audience sat the Burgomaster. He was far more rejoiced to be there than to be carrying out an oppressive law. His little finger had ceased its movements against the Baptist, and there he sat to show what the power of God's right arm could do; for he was listening to the Word of God from a Baptist preacher, in a meeting-house built by the man whom he had been called upon to put down. Oh, why are we afraid of men? Six feet or less of bone, and blood, and flesh; and you are afraid of it! Yet, yonder is the eternal God that filleth all things, and you are so little afraid of him, that you disobey him, though he can cast both body and soul into hell. "I say unto you," said Christ, "fear him." So say I, his unworthy servant; and when you once fear him, you will lose the Zedekiah weakness, and become strong for God.

But I must not stay. May the good Spirit bless these searching words!

III. I want, in the next place, to SHOW YOU WHERE THIS KIND OF SOFTNESS LEADS. When a man is like Zedekiah, who cannot say anything against the princes, but must let them have their own way, what comes of it? Certainly nothing that is good.

First, I think that such an easy-going creature *dishonours his own self.* Does yonder young man confess that he cannot say "no": that he must do as he is asked, and cannot stand out against even a wicked request? Then I am sorry for him. Is he a man? Is he not lowering himself beneath the dignity of manhood? I do not know, dear friends, what you think about the opinions of others; but I have always felt that if I could keep a good opinion of myself, so far that my conscience could not accuse me of doing wrong, I was not particularly anxious about what anybody else's opinion of me might be. "But," said one to a good man, "if you do that one pleasant thing nobody will know of it, and so you will not be disgraced in the eyes of anybody." "No," said the good man, "but I should be disgraced in my own eyes if I did it, and I have more respect for my own judgment of myself

than I have for other people's opinion of me." This is not egotism, but uprightness of heart. The world's poet makes Brutus say, "I had as lief not be, as live to be in awe of such a thing as I myself." What! creep and cringe and beg leave to do right, and crave permission to believe the truth, and speak it? Ask another man's leave, or some woman's leave to obey my God? Not I. No, let the worms eat me before it comes to that. O sirs, it is a fearful thing for a man to get into that humiliating state that he has no mind of his own. Call such a creature a spaniel, that must fetch and carry at his lady's bidding; but call him not a man. He has reduced himself to nothing. From such dishonour, great Lord, deliver us!

Again, dear friends, such trimming *brings dishonour upon one's position.* Only think of this. "The king—the king," he says, "The king is not he that can do any thing against you"; and further on we read, "Zedekiah the king said, I am afraid." Pretty king that! His kingship was defiled, his crown was stained, when he came into that condition of bondage. King! Call him "slave." Yet, remember, this also may apply to yourself. You, too, may hold a position which you degrade. You are a father, yet you fear your boys and girls! You have no family prayer: you do not know how your children might like it. You are a father; are you? Do you obey your own children, and call yourself a father? You are a master, but you never speak to your servants or your workpeople about religion. You do not know how they might take it! You are a pretty master! Names are strangely given nowadays: there is not much that is masterly about you. Poor slave! Is there not many a person in this world who labours to gain an office, and then is afraid to carry it out? God intended us, when he gave us a position in life, to live worthy of that position, and rightly to exercise the authority and influence which it brings. Think of a king saying, "I am afraid"; but that is what the French king said to Bernard Palissy, the potter. As nearly as I can remember the story, the monarch said, "Palissy, you must go to mass." "That I never will," said Palissy. "Then I am afraid that I shall have to give you up to be burnt." "There," said Palissy, "your majesty could not make me say such a word as that with all the power you have. I am no king, but only a poor potter, but nobody ever made me say, 'I am afraid.'" Oh, that fear of men, that dread of ridicule, that wishing to avoid sarcasm! How it has made a man come down from the dignity of his office, from the honour of the position which God has conferred upon him, and has made him baser than the menials about him! Will men never learn to honour themselves and their position by a dignified resolve to do the right at all costs?

Shall I tell you what this will still further lead to? Well, you will demean yourself, and degrade your position, and then the day will probably come when *you will give up all religion.* I have seen it actually done. Yes, I have seen a young man, who has been, at home, almost all that you could desire, and he has come up to London and dropped into a warehouse where there was no Christian feeling; and at first he has gone to a place of worship, and written home to his mother to tell her the text, as you are going to do to-night, Mr. John.

But after a while he has gone wandering out for a little excursion on the Sabbath, and by-and-by he has become a ringleader among those who dare to laugh at sacred things. One has a tower of observation here, and sees sad sights perpetually. Little by little every gracious habit is trampled on through fear of man. The weak young man slides down, down, down. By easy descents his life-vessel has glided down the rapids with the current, till at last, he that bade fair for heaven, shoots over the dread Niagara of everlasting ruin. I am afraid, young man, that your easy compliance with bad companions will ultimately lead to your giving up all religion. I pray you, pause.

Then *it will come to your doing injustice to God and good men.* The king did not like it, but he gave Jeremiah over to the cruel princes. "He is in your hand." You do not believe that you could ever come to treat God's minister with derision, and God's cause with contumely. I think I hear you say, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" Nay, if you were a dog you would not do it; but, being something worse than a dog, if left to yourself, you will do it. If you have not courage to stand fast now, and say, "I will serve the Lord," you will drift and drift till you will become an enemy of the cause of Christ. If Jeremiah had died in that dungeon, Zedekiah would have been an accomplice in his murder. So it has happened with young men and young women who were once, apparently, godly, and inclined to better things: they have gradually gone aside through the softness of their character, till they have become foes of Christ, and have dared defy the God whom they once feared.

At last, it gets to this, that men who trifle with their consciences, as Zedekiah did, *are unable to get any good out of God's prophets any more.* Zedekiah was well admonished and advised by the prophet, but nothing came of it. I am sadly fearful that you, dear friends, who are not converted, who have heard me a long time, will soon be unable to get any blessing out of anything I say. I may even become a savour of death unto death to you. I am told that the good people in the valley of Ohio, whose houses have been swept away by the tornado, had a warning that the storm was coming. The storm-drums were out, and the newspapers announced that a great depression was coming their way. They did not take any notice of that information; it did not seem very threatening, for they had grown used to paragraphs about the weather. If it was only once in a year that the weather could be fairly predicted, we should be wanting to buy the Gazette; but now, as we get it every morning, we do not take any particular or practical notice of it. These poor Ohio friends, therefore, took no warning, and were by no means prepared for the hurricane. Familiarity breeds neglect. People live close under the big bells of the cathedral, and sleep well at night; and people who have houses where the train passes just under the bedroom window, seldom trouble themselves about the whistling or the rumble, but sleep right on. You may continue to listen to the earnest warnings which I endeavour to give; and after hearing me for years, your hearing will come to nothing, if you get to be good, easy people, who say, "Yes, yes, yes," to everything, and there let it end. I endeavour to be earnest, and

to give striking calls to repentance, but I fear lest you should grow so used to me that you will take no more notice of me than of a noise in the street. You may look on the sun till you become blind, and hear the gospel till you grow deaf to it. God save you from that, and save you at once, on the spot, beyond all fear of such a calamity! Oh, that the Lord would grant me my request, and by his mighty grace bring you at once to his Son Jesus!

IV. I will finish with this. I would LABOUR TO FREE MEN FROM THIS COMPLAINT. I would labour to free them from it by the grace of God.

First, I would say to you, remember, dear friend, if you continue in this undecided, yielding condition, you will miss your way altogether. You must grow firm, for *without it you cannot be a Christian*. It is necessary, in order to obey Christ, that you should take up your cross and follow him. He will never number you amongst his disciples if you say "yea," and yet do "nay"—if you call him Master and Lord, and yet try to please the world. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You must come out on the Lord's side. The promise is, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." You cannot be Christians without being decided, without having your minds made up for righteousness and faith in Christ. Therefore, hesitate no longer. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" How long will ye be in this fluid state, taking no permanent impression? May God himself in mercy make you to believe in Christ, and become his faithful followers! May his Holy Spirit work in you to this end!

Christ deserves this. If he died for me, shall not I acknowledge him as my Saviour? If he has bought me with his precious blood, shall I not confess my faith in him? O dear hearer, if you have learned to stand at the foot of the cross, and say, "Jesus died for me," I am sure you will feel that if it cost you a thousand deaths, you must confess your obligations to him and declare that, living and dying, you will be his!

Do not make any mistake about it. Whatever you seem to gain in personal ease, by halting and hesitating now, *it will cost you dear in the end*. If a man takes his stand, and says, "I am a Christian," it is the best thing to do in the great battle of life. If you yield a little you will have to yield more, and, having yielded more, you will have to yield altogether. If ever the Spirit of God should fetch you out to be clear and decided, it will be awfully hard work to escape from the nets and traps which you are creating by your present yielding. To say "No," however difficult, is an easier thing than to trifle and hesitate, and almost comply. You lose even when you seem to gain, if you let the tempter have his way.

Do not think, dear friend, that you are gaining anyone's esteem by sinful compliances, for you are doing the reverse: you are lowering yourself before the Philistines. Your example is ruined; your influence is destroyed; you are doing harm, and not good. The men that the world thinks most of are the men that stand up, stand straight,

stand firm. I heard one say of a preacher the other day, "I can hear him with pleasure, for he is not an echo, but a voice." That is to say, he was not a mere copyist, a being made to be dragged like a tin-kettle at the tail of a cur; but one who had a mind of his own, and dared to express it. He wins respect who, knowing his mind, and having his mind fixed on Christ and divine truth, becomes a voice for Christ, and speaks plainly and boldly. Men despise you else. If you have no manliness, how can you have any godliness?

And oh, *what will it be in the hour of death*, to lie dying, racked with pain, and then to have conscience whispering, "You were a coward. You were afraid to come out for Christ. You hid your light under a bushel. You chose to comply with the temptations of the world"? In that dread hour, when the death-sweat is on your brow, you will have enough to think of, without having remorse to sting you—the remorse of a false and coward heart. Oh, if you can then say, not boastingly, but truly, "I did follow my Lord. I trusted in him alone, and I did not blush to confess it"—this, with God's grace, will make dying to be easy work.

In the next world, what must be the doom of the man who was ashamed of Christ, when the Lord himself will say, "I am ashamed of him! I am ashamed of him!" The Lord Jesus is not ashamed of the penitent drunkard: for he cleanses him. He is not ashamed of the repenting harlot, but permits her to wash his feet with her tears. But in that day he will be ashamed of all those who have been ashamed of him. He cannot own us if we deny him.

May God bless this word of mine! I have not so much preached the gospel as shown you your need of the grace of God to make you decide for Jesus. May that grace be sought and found at once, for his dear sake! I have worn out all my strength in pleading with you. May the Lord himself take you in hand! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jeremiah xxxviii. 1—23.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—674, 671, 678.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—Thanks for your prayers, and to the Lord, who hears them. Your preacher is free from pain, and hopes now to rest, and recover strength. This sermon will, I trust, be suitable for giving to those who are halting between two opinions; and if well salted with prayer, may prove salutary to the fickle ones, who abound around us. Is not this an occasion for looking out persons of your acquaintance, and aiming at their good by putting this discourse in their way? If one preaches, and another gives the sermon currency, the workers may yet rejoice together. Forgive any egotism which appears in this suggestion: what is worth preaching is worth scattering.

Yours, for Jesus' sake,

Menton, December 12, 1890. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GOD FIGHTING SIN.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 28TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them."—Isaiah lxiii. 10.

THIS is a terrible case. When God is turned to be a man's enemy, and fights against him, he is in a desperate plight. With other enemies we may contend with some hope of success, but not with the Omnipotent. The enmity of others is an affliction, but the enmity of God is destruction. If he turns to be our enemy, then everything is turned against us. The stars in their courses fight against us, and the stones in the fields are in league for our stumbling. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" But if God be against us, who can be for us? The words read like a funeral knell: "He was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them."

This shows us that *God is not indifferent to sin.* Men may try to persuade themselves that God does not care; that it is nothing to him how men act, whether they break or keep his laws. Men may plead that he is "kind to the unthankful and to the evil," and the same event happens unto all, both to the righteous and to the wicked; and so indeed it seems for the present. Our shortsightedness may even assure us that the ungodly prosper, and have the best of it; but this is only our blindness. God hates sin now and always. He would not be God if he did not. God is stirred with righteous indignation against every kind of evil: it moves his Spirit to anger. Some believe in an impassive God; but certainly the God of the Bible is never so described. He is represented in Holy Scripture after the manner of men; but how else could he be represented to men? If he were represented after the manner of God, you and I could understand nothing at all of the description; but as he is represented to us in Scripture, the Lord notes sin, feels sin, grows angry with sin, is provoked, and his Holy Spirit is vexed by the rebellion of men. Let me read the solemn text again: "But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them."

God is always the same, but his acts vary. He changes not, and yet he is represented in our text as turning. He turns in his action, though he does not turn in his purpose. He often wills a change, though he never changes his will. He is always the same God, but he does not always show us the same side of his character. Sometimes he manifests mercy, at other times justice: he is as much God in the one case as in the other. At one time he makes a world; at another time he destroys it: but he is the same Jehovah. A change in his outward dispensation does not argue any change in his inward disposition. He is an unchanging God of whom we read, "He was turned to be their enemy."

Having said these two or three things as a helpful commencement, I would invite you to consider this remarkably impressive verse with very great reverence and awe. May the Holy Spirit help us! The current idea now is, "Never preach anything that is dreadful or terrible. If you do, you will earn as bad a character as Spurgeon." Now, I am not ashamed, in the least degree, to have a bad character for preaching against the evil of sin, and declaring the sure punishment of it. What have I to gain by such preaching? Shall I get the applause of men? Nay, the whole current of this generation's liking rushes the other way. Let the preacher tell men that they may live as they like, and that it will come all right in the long run, and that will please them. Universal salvation is a very popular doctrine among the "cultured" folk. I want none of your popularity. I will preach to you, as long as this tongue moves in my head, God's truth, whether it offend or please; and the day shall declare who best loved your souls—those who could flatter, or those who spoke unpalatable truth. Our text has in it very little, apparently, that may minister comfort to anybody; and yet my persuasion is, that if, with reverent heart, you lend your ear to what it teaches, it will lead you into a surer comfort than you will ever find in the philosophies of men, yea, it will bring your conscience into a state of rest with God, for which you will bless God as long as ever you live.

I. First, MY TEXT BELONGS TO THE LORD'S OWN OFFENDING CHILDREN. Let me try to find them out, and lay this text home to them. There are some of God's own people—really converted, saved people—who have, nevertheless, degenerated into such a state of sin that the Lord is turned to be their enemy. If you read this chapter, you will see that it is so. Let me begin at the seventh verse. "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses. For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy." See, dear friends: once they were on the lap of love, once they lay in the bosom of favour, once

they knew the sympathy of Christ, once they could sing of loving-kindnesses, and a multitude of mercies; *but they rebelled.* Is it not a shocking thing that the favoured people of God should backslide? Is it not sad that they who have eaten the bread of heaven should hunger for the ashes of this world; that men who have lain in the bosom of Christ should, nevertheless, play the traitor to him, and provoke his anger? Yet it is so, sadly so; we have seen it so in others. God grant that it may not be so with us!

These people, after tasting all this love, and all this favour, became rebellious. He calls them "rebels." They were not merely children that made a mistake, children that fell through folly, but "they rebelled." Does the child of God ever get into that state? Yes, children have rebelled. David thus erred, and many others have shamefully rebelled against their God. I cannot say how far a man who has tasted of the grace of God may go in sin; but, I pray you, do not experiment upon it. Nay, let us keep as far away from sin as possible. Yet it appears that those with whom the Saviour had such sympathy that in all their affliction he was afflicted, nevertheless "rebelled and vexed his holy Spirit."

Well, then, what happened? Now we come to the text indeed: "He was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." This is the story in many cases. *He sends affliction.* There come upon the man's harvest the palmer-worm, and the caterpillar, and the canker-worm. There come upon his business a blight and a blast. He cannot make it out; for where everything seemed to go well, all affairs now go amiss. All that he gets is like money poured into a bag that is full of holes. Seeing that he is a child of God, and has become a rebel, he has vexed God's Spirit, and chastisement falls upon him. Perhaps he is brought low by a painful disease. Perhaps a dear child is taken away. Affliction comes into the family one way or another: not the affliction of Job, which tried him for God's glory; but the affliction of Jacob, who was afflicted in his family because that family had become defiled with sin. God is jealous, and deals severely with his erring children.

He sends them affliction; but worse than that, he turns to be their enemy, and *he fights against them by withholding the comforts of the Holy Spirit.* Oh, how they once enjoyed a sermon! it was full of grace and truth. They do not enjoy it now. The same preacher; other people are edified as much as before; but they are not. Such a man goes to pray; but he feels no Spirit pleading within. He reads the Bible, and it is a dead letter. He seeks the company of Christian people, but their society is dreary to him, and yields no solace. God has shut up the windows of heaven. He has made the angels cease to bring down blessings by the way of the golden ladder. God has turned to be his enemy, and fights against him. I have known cases in which true people of God (I know they were the true people of God, for they have come back, and they never did lose the life of God, even when they were away from him) have come to this—that God has fought against them in their prayers, and they seemed to pray like a man shouting inside a great copper caldron, where every sound echoes in his ears like thunder. I charge you that are the

people of God to mind what you are at; for God, who loves you, will deal roughly with you if you sin against him. Remember that text, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." As I have often said, if a man saw a boy in the street breaking windows, or doing mischief, he might say very little to him; but if he was his own boy, he would give him a smart blow, and send him home; and so is it when the Lord catches his own children sinning. He may let the common sinner go on, and sin until judgment shall be executed; but as for his own children, they cannot transgress with impunity. "He was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them."

At such times, if they still pursue any Christian career of usefulness, *they are smitten with great barrenness*, and their work is without efficacy. I should greatly sorrow if my words brought bruising to the tenderest of God's people; but yet I know that it is so. If the preacher leaves his God, his God will leave him to preach in vain. If the teacher quits the Saviour, the Saviour will quit the teacher, and leave him, or her, to fail with the children. What generally happens with a minister when God has gone? Well, instead of going to God, and humbling himself and crying to him for mercy, he resolves that he will buy a new organ. That will do the trick. The new organ, after all, blow it as they may, does not come to much. Well, then, he will have sensational entertainments, a Sunday-evening concert—fiddling, or something or other. If God will not help him, he is in the same plight as Saul the son of Kish. He will try music first, and if that does not render him aid, he will go to the witch of Endor, now called "modern theology," and ask assistance there. God have mercy upon us, if we ever do that! I do not wish for success in the ministry if God does not give it to me; and I pray that you, who are workers for God, may not wish to have any success except that which comes from God himself in God's own way; for if you could heap up, like the sand of the sea, converts that you had made by odd, unchristian ways, they would be gone like the sand of the sea as soon as another tide comes up. O child of God, do not try to do without God! Do not bring in new inventions to patch up the breach that your sin has made. If the Lord turns to be your enemy, and fights against you, bow before him, and confess your wrong.

I leave this point when I have made solemn enquiry. Am I speaking to any Christian man or woman to whom this text is sorrowfully true? Is not sin the cause of your sorrow? I beseech you, do not trifle with this matter. It is a very solemn thing to have God fighting against you. Say to him, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." But do not despair. If the Lord had meant to destroy you, he would have sternly said, "He is joined to idols: let him alone." To leave a man altogether alone is God's ultimatum with the hopeless; but to flog the wanderer back to his Lord is love in a mask. The wise man can see beneath the mask, and understand that it is because God would not destroy you with the wicked that therefore he now brings you under the discipline of his family, and makes you feel that sin and smart must go together in an heir of heaven. Seek you the Lord; cry unto him; and confess your sin. The parable of the prodigal son

belongs much more to you than it does to an unconverted person; for you can call God "Father," and you may come back to him as a son; for you are his son, notwithstanding all your riotous living in the far country, and all your wasting of your Father's substance. Arise, and go to him at once. You know the way. Retrace it. You know your Father: fly to him immediately. Put your head into his bosom, and sob out your confession, "Father, I have sinned"; and before this present service is over, you shall receive your Lord's full absolution, and you shall feel yourself—

> "To your Father's bosom pressed,
> Once again a child confessed;
> From his house no more to roam,
> But with God to rest at home."

God will soon put away the rod when you put away the sin. If he does not stay the chastisement, you will patiently bear it, and bless him that he has forgiven you; for that is the chief thing to be thought of. As a rule, the Lord ceases to fight against the man who ceases from sin; but if he does not, prostrate yourself before him. There is a picture in a quaint old book which represents a man with a flail trying to strike another, and the man who is assailed runs close in, so that the adversary cannot strike him. Run in upon God, and he cannot strike you. What does he say? "Let him take hold of my strength; and he shall make peace with me." That is—go right up to God, who has been smiting you, and say, "Lord, I fully submit to thee. By the bowels of thy compassion, I pray thee, forgive me, and restore me to thy love." He has no pleasure that you should suffer: as his dear child he would have you happy. He is grieved that you should wander away from him. Come back at once, backslider; come back even now. The Lord enable you to do so now, for Jesus' sake!

II. THE TEXT IS TRUE TO THOSE WHO CANNOT SAY THAT THEY ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD, who would give their eyes if they could. Many an awakened sinner feels that he has rebelled, and vexed God's Holy Spirit, and now he feels that God has turned to be his enemy, and is fighting against him by sending him trouble. Yes, he was getting on splendidly, and his prosperity was a snare to him. He had plenty of money, and therefore he could go into every place of amusement and every haunt of vice. Now he mourns an empty pocket. To-night he hardly knows where he is going to find a lodging. He was a young gentleman once, but he has to herd with beggars now. Yes, many and many a man has been brought down, by lechery and drunkenness, to the lowest abyss of penury. God has turned to be his enemy, for all things fail him: he has tried to get a situation, and he cannot; he has worn his boots off his feet, and he cannot find work to do. Perhaps I speak to some young woman here whose course has been far away from God; and she, too, has come down in another sense. Health is gone. Alas, for that laughing girl! That hectic flush upon her cheek tells that the worm is within the fruit. Poor soul! she is sickening. She will pass away, and she is still without hope. God has turned to be her enemy (so she thinks), and he fights against her, for the medicine is of no

use to her; while other people seem to have been cured, she remains as sickly as ever. There are those here against whom God has been fighting of late; and when God fights, it is not child's play, nor mere buffeting: he fights indeed. Perhaps he may be fighting with some of you in this respect, that your spirits are gone. You were once as merry as a cricket. You used to count it one of the easiest things to drive dull care away. Oh, what a jolly fellow you were! And now you cannot hold up your head. An awful depression has come upon you, and you cannot look up. It may have been through a sermon: or you were all alone, thinking, and you began to feel despondent, melancholy, unhappy. God is fighting against you, and in the depths of your soul you feel his frown. Or else you are in pecuniary difficulties. Formerly, your prosperity was your ruin. You could not be saved while you were rich; and your ease and your carelessness had to be broken in upon. There was no saving you without burning up the bed in which you slept so securely. God is tearing to pieces all your deceitful joy, and making you see the truth of matters.

I should not wonder if God is fighting against some of you in another way, so that *your flimsy notions of religion are all going*. You formerly boasted, "I can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ whenever I like, and it will be all right." You once thought it such an easy thing to believe; but you do not find it so now. You have been thinking about salvation lately, and it is not quite such a trifling matter as you thought it was. Why, now you cry, "I cannot feel. What is worse, I cannot believe, I cannot remember. I cannot restrain myself from evil, I seem possessed by the devil. God help me, for I cannot help myself." God does not seem to help you, but he makes you feel more of your weakness than you ever knew before; and the more you labour to be better the worse you are. "He was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them."

In the progress of this battle you may have suffered very serious damage. There came a man into this Tabernacle, some years ago, who said, "I got spoiled one Sunday morning. I came into this Tabernacle, and I thought that I was as good a man as any tradesman within fifty miles of the place." Said he, "I went out spoiled; for I was made to confess that I was as bad as anybody in Newington, or within a thousand miles of the place." That is what comes to us when God begins to fight against our self-righteousness. I thought myself, as a child, a good and decent lad, till I saw my own heart. I was a fine soldier till God came with his battle-axe, smashed in my shield, and hewed away my finery, and I stood there, in my own apprehension at that time, the worst youth that had ever lifted his hand against God. God makes great havoc with the trappings of self-righteousness. Our tawdry finery soon goes to pieces when the truth deals with it.

At such times, when God is fighting against a man, *his inward sorrows seem to increase*. His memory shouts at him, "Remember this! Remember that! Remember the other! Remember that night of sin! Remember that day of rebellion!" His fears rise up and stalk like grim ghosts before him. His hopes, that once sang sweetly siren songs, now turn their sonnets into dirges. His expectations fail. The man's

thoughts are all a case of knives, cutting his soul at every point. O sirs, when God besieges the town of Mansoul, he sets his batteries against every gate. His artillery is turned against every part of the wall. His big shells burst in the centre of the heart. The Lord is a man of war, Jehovah is his name. When he goes forth to battle, it shall be terrible for the man against whom he fights.

I hear you say to me, "You are giving a very terrible description." I am not describing everybody that is saved. Many come to Christ very readily, and simply trust in him, and live at once. But, my hearer, you are not of that tender sort. You would not come. A mother's tears could not persuade you, your teacher's exhortations could not induce you; even the gentler dealings of God could not drive or draw you; and you have lived in sin till at last God has effectively taken you in hand. Your conscience is aroused; you cannot go on any longer as you now are.

"Oh," says one, "I do not feel like that." Alas! I wish you did. I have to meet with a great many people of a sorrowful spirit. They are constantly seeking me out. I have known them come for many a mile to have a talk with me; for they seem to think that I know something about these wounds and bruises. They are right in their belief, although the fact causes me great labour among the sad. Oh, dear hearts, if God fights against you, throw down your weapons! Pull those feathers out of your caps! Down on your faces before him! Yield, and when you have yielded he will do you no harm; but he will stoop over you, and lift you up, and forgive you. The woman taken in adultery in the presence of Christ is a sample of what he will do with you, taken in the very act of rebellion against him. The tender Saviour said, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more!" Dear soul, yield, yield, yield! Make no excuse. Offer no extenuation. Yield to the omnipotence of God, which, in your case, will be omnipotent love. He has wounded, and he will heal. He has torn you, and he will bind you up. "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he woundeth, and his hands make whole." But how can he make those alive who were never killed? You that were never wounded, you who to-night have been sitting here and smiling at your own ease, what can mercy do for you? Do not congratulate yourselves on your peace, for at the bottom of the painful experience I have described there lies the wondrous secret that this fighting against men is fighting against their evil for their good, that they may be saved. God fights against your pride, that you may be humbled: he fights against your self-confidence, that you may be ashamed of it; and when his warfare has answered its purpose, God will be no enemy of yours; but you will find him blotting out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your iniquities.

I leave off when I have warned you to watch carefully that you do not go into sin. It is a blessed thing to be forgiven; but it is a more blessed thing to be kept from sin. Oh, what agony, what mischief, I have seen brought upon individuals and families by acts of carelessness which have afterwards led to acts of licentiousness! Steer clear of the lesser forms of sin, lest you so vex the Spirit that he shall turn to be your enemy, and fight against you.

III. Lastly, THIS TEXT IS A VERY DREADFUL ONE IN REFERENCE TO THOSE WHO DIE IMPENITENT. Concerning those who die impenitent, what shall we say? What ought to be the truth about them? You —I speak only now of those who have heard the gospel, of such as are sitting in this Tabernacle, where the warning and the promise are set before them—if you die impenitent, having wilfully rejected the great sacrifice of Christ, you will die with a vengeance. Jesus Christ has died, and you have refused the merit of his blood. You have wilfully and wickedly done despite to the mercy of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and this is in addition to all your other sins. Now, let me ask you—What is to be done with the man who will not have mercy when it is set before him? If a convicted criminal is invited to confess and receive pardon, and he will not do it, what remains but to carry out the sentence? Both justice and injured mercy require that it should be so. When a man gets into the next world, who dies refusing Christ, and rejecting divine mercy, he will fight against God there, and, according to his ability, he will be a greater sinner there than here. Shall God give him pleasure? Shall the Lord make such a rebel happy? Shall he stand by and say, "I will reward the rebel. He has vexed my Spirit, but I will ennoble and reward him"? Shall the Judge of all the earth act so? If you will turn to this Book, you will not find between these two covers a solitary ray of hope for a man who dies without God, and without Christ. I defy any man who believes this Book to be inspired, to find anything in its sacred page but blank despair for the man who will not in this life accept the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. My Lord and Master said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." That is his word, and there it stands, and there it will stand for ever. It will never be reversed. It is the final sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." I charge you, by the living God, do not provoke him to this. Rush not upon the edge of Jehovah's sword.

At once look to Jesus crucified—Jesus crucified for the guilty, Jesus who came into the world, took our nature, and bare our sin and shame. He cries from the cross, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." I cannot speak to you like an angel from heaven, but I speak like a sinner saved from hell; and I implore you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved; "for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God bless you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cvi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—176, 106 (Part II.), 570.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A MEDIATOR.

A Sermon

Delivered on Lord's-day Evening, February 23rd, 1890, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

"Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one."—Galatians iii. 20.

The text does not strike you as difficult, but it is exceedingly perplexing to the interpreter. I was looking at one very old commentator, who is a great favourite of mine, and I noticed that he said that there were two hundred and fifty different meanings given by expositors to this verse. John Prime, in 1587, called it "an endless labyrinth." "Oh," I thought, "here is a nice wood to lose oneself in! Two hundred and fifty meanings!" Turning to a more modern author—a great reader, however—he said he believed that more than four hundred different interpretations had been put upon the passage. This was getting from a wood into a forest—a black forest, where one might lose himself hopelessly. Should I preach from such a text? Yes; but I must not worry you with these many interpretations. Some of them cannot be correct; some of them are, no doubt, nearly accurate. What does the passage mean? I will not venture to say that I know; but I will venture to say that I know how to use it for a practical purpose. If the Spirit of God will help us, we shall find our way, by a very simple clue, to the practical meaning, and make use of the words for our soul's profit.

A mediator! What is a mediator? A mediator is a middleman, a go-between; one who comes in between two parties who otherwise could not commune with each other. Take the case of Moses. God's voice was very terrible, and the people could not bear it; so Moses came in and spake on the behalf of God. The presence of Jehovah upon the mountain was so glorious that men could not climb the hill, and endure that great sight, so Moses went up for men to God. He was a mediator, speaking for the Lord, and making intercession for the people. This is what Paul alludes to when he speaks of the law being "ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator"; and here the apostle lets slip a sort of general statement—a truth which does not seem to be in connection with anything that goes before, or anything that follows after. He lays this down as a general rule: "A mediator is

not a mediator of one, but God is one." Paul hath dust of gold: his every thought is precious. He is looking at one object, and talking about it; and meanwhile he strikes a stone with his foot, and lays bare a vein of gold. As if he did not notice the treasure, he passes on, and leaves that vein of gold for you and for me. He is very fond of a digression. It is the style of Paul, and the style of every man who is very full and running over. He keeps to one argument, but he sees many others. While he is running towards the goal, he lets fall golden apples in the form of general principles which occur to him at the time. I understand Paul here, not as going on with any argument, but as letting fall a general principle, which I—taking it out of its connection—hope to use for our profit to-night. A mediator, a go-between, an interposer, is not a mediator of one, that is clear; but God is one. What shall we learn from this?

I. First, A MEDIATOR IS NOT FOR GOD ALONE. A mediator deals with two persons—with God and man. A mediator does not come because God wants, himself, any kind of mediator. He is eternally one; and if you view him as the sacred Trinity, yet he is a Trinity in unity. God is one. Some persons call themselves Unitarians who have no exclusive right to the name. All Trinitarians are Unitarians: though we believe that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet we confess that there are not three gods, but one God. Now, between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, there is no difference, no ground for contention; and therefore no mediator is needed to reconcile the divine persons. God is one: therefore our God does not need the mediator for himself. Who is the mediator wanted for, then? Why, for somebody else. That somebody else is here to-night, and I want to find him out. A mediator! Blessed be God, there is a mediator; but God does not want him for his personal purposes; *there is another person for whom the mediator is required.* Where is that other person? In the very gift of Christ as a mediator, in the sending of him in his divine and human nature, in Christ's life, in Christ's death, God had an eye to another party. God, looking out beyond himself to somebody else, provided a mediator. That ought to be a great thought to you; for if God is looking out of himself, why should he not look at you? If God has so looked out of himself as to provide a mediator, that must mean that he is thinking of a creature who needs one. O my soul, may he not be thinking of thee? Though thou hast wandered from him, and lived for many years without him, may it not be that as there is a mediator, and that mediator cannot be for God alone, for God is one, that mediator may be intended to meet my need, and bring me back to God?

Now, according to the run of the text, and according to the run of Scripture, *that other party, for whom a mediator is sent, is man.* Man has fallen out with God. Man is at enmity with God, and God is necessarily angry with man, for he cannot but hate sin, and he must punish evil. God, therefore, is looking out on man; and here am I to-night, sitting in the house of prayer: is he looking on me? God desireth fellowship with men. God would have men brought near to him; why should not I, then, be brought near? Why should I live at a distance? Here is a mediator: that mediator cannot be for God alone,

for God is one; he must be meant for a second person: may not I be that person? Let me lift my eye to heaven, and say, "O gracious Lord, grant that I may be that other person for whom this mediator is concerned!" for a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one, and would have me to be the second, that there may be work for a mediator to do. That is clear enough.

II. Now go a step further. In the second place, A MEDIATOR IS NOT FOR PERSONS WHO ARE AGREED WITH EACH OTHER. A mediator is not needed for persons of one heart and of one soul. I want no mediator between myself and my brother, between myself and my son, between myself and my wife. We are perfectly at one already, and no mediator is wanted. So, then, it is clear that, if there be a mediator, it is for two persons between whom *there is some ground of difference.* Mark well this truth, and catch at it. I am not going to say pretty things, or use fine words; yet I say to those of you who long to be saved, —Catch at what I am saying; for it will help you. A mediator! That must be for persons between whom and God there is ground of quarrel. Sinner, sinner, this is good news for you! A mediator is not for a man who is perfectly at one with God; but for you, who have by many sins provoked God, who by the sinfulness of your nature stand at a distance from him. There is need of a mediator between you and the thrice-holy God; and it is for such as you that a mediator has appeared. Do you see this truth? A mediator is not a mediator between those who are at one. He is a mediator between persons who differ; and that is the case with you as to your God.

III. A mediator also comes when THERE IS A GROUND OF DIFFERENCE WHICH CANNOT READILY BE REMOVED; for if the ground of difference is trivial, and the two parties are willing to be agreed, they soon settle the matter; but a mediator, an arbitrator, is brought in when the case is hard. Such is your case and mine by nature. We have sinned. God is just. He is full of compassion, and willing to forgive as far as the slight is against his person; but he is also King and Judge of all the earth, and he must punish sin. If he does not punish sin, he will be unjust, and the injustice which does not punish sin is cruelty to all righteous men. If our judges were to-morrow to say to every thief, housebreaker, murderer, "Go your way; you are forgiven," it would be kindness to them, but it would be cruelty to us. It would not be true mercy on the part of God to pass by sin without a punishment. He could not occupy his throne as the guardian of right and the protector of virtue if he did not execute judgment upon sin. Here, then, we perceive a barrier between God and the guilty: God must punish offenders; and man has offended. How can these two be brought together? Here steps in the mediator, one of a thousand, who can lay his hand upon both, compose this deadly feud, and make eternal peace. A mediator is not for those who are at one, but for those who have a ground of difference which cannot be readily removed.

IV. In this case, if there be any wish on the part of the offending one to be reconciled, it may be done; for the offended God is willing to be at peace. THERE WOULD BE NO USE IN A MEDIATOR UNLESS THE PARTIES WERE BOTH WILLING TO BE RECONCILED TO EACH OTHER. A mediator who comes in between two who have a continued hatred

simply loses his time; but in our case God is willing to be reconciled. "Fury is not in me," saith he. But man is not willing to be reconciled to God until grace changes his heart. If there be on your part a wish to end your quarrel, and to be friends with God, you will be happy to know that there is a mediator. Jesus stands waiting to remove the barrier that divides you from God, and to reconcile you to God by his own death.

There must, however, in order to a mediator, an umpire, be *a willingness on both sides to leave the matter in his hands.* There must be a difference which they cannot remove, a difference which they wish to have removed, and a difference which they are willing to leave in the umpire's hands. God is willing to leave our matter with Christ. He has done so. He has laid help on One that is mighty. He has qualified and commissioned him to come as an ambassador, and make peace between him and guilty men. On your part, are you willing to hand the matter over to Christ entirely, to do what he bids you, to own to what he would have you confess, to repent wherein he tells you you are wrong, to seek to be right wherein he warns you that you have failed? Will you give your case over to the mediator, and make Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to be your representative in the business? God trusts his honour in the hands of his Son Jesus. He is not afraid to leave everything that concerns his moral government and his royal character in the hands of the Well-beloved. Will you trust your soul's eternal interests in those same dear pierced hands? If so, rejoice that there is a mediator between two parties that have long been alienated—a mediator between God and you. Take him to your heart to-night.

V. Now we will go a step further. A mediator is not a mediator of one; but HE STUDIES THE INTERESTS OF BOTH PARTIES. Such is our Lord Jesus Christ. Coming here on earth, did he come to save men? Yes. Did he come to glorify his Father's name? Yes. For which of these two purposes did he chiefly come? I will not say. He came for both, and he blends the two. He looks after the interests of man, and pleads the causes of his soul: he looks after the interests of God, and vindicates the honour of God, even unto death. Is he obedient, that he might magnify the law of God, and make it honourable? Yes, but he is mediator that he may deliver us from the curse of the law. Beloved, our blessed mediator is not a mediator for one. An umpire must not take sides, and a mediator that did not understand more than one side, and was not concerned for anybody but one side, would be unworthy of the name. Our mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, has both natures. Is he God? Verily, he is very God of very God. Is he man? Assuredly, of the substance of his mother, as truly man as any man among us. Is he most God, or is he most man? This is a question not to be asked, and, therefore, not to be answered. He is my brother. He is God's Son. Yea, he is himself God. What better umpire can we want than this divine human being, who can lay his hands upon us both, who counts it not robbery to be equal with God, and yet calls man his brother? A mediator is not a mediator of one, since he wears both natures, and espouses both causes. Oh, how dear to the heart of Christ is the glory of God! He lives, he dies, he

rises again, to glorify the Father. Oh, how dear to Christ is the salvation of men! He lives, he dies, he rises again, and pleads for the salvation of sinners. He has the enthusiasm of humanity, but he has the enthusiasm of divinity as well. God must be glorified; he will die to do it. Man must be saved; he will die to do it. What a splendid mediator, who is not a mediator of one, but a mediator who takes up the cause of both sides!

VI. In this capacity, OUR BLESSED MEDIATOR PLEADS FOR BOTH WITH BOTH; for he is not a mediator of one. A mediator, when he would make peace, goes to this one, and he states the case, and he urges him, and pleads with him. When he has done that, he returns to the other party, and states the other side. He pleads with the one on the behalf of the other. Even so our Lord Jesus Christ comes in between God and man. Oh, how wonderful! He pleads with God for sinners, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And then he turns round, and pleads with sinners for God, and bids them turn to him, and be reconciled to him, since he is their Father and their Friend! A mediator is not a mediator of one. He who should come in and pretend to be a mediator, and then throw all the blame on one party, and care only for the interests of the other party, would not be a mediator, but a partisan. But, in this case, here is One who has something to say, not in vindication, or excuse for sin, but in pleading for mercy to the sinner. He has something to say to magnify the justice of God, and yet he cries for mercy. He prays, "Have mercy, O God! Have mercy upon the guilty!" I think that I have got the run of this text, somehow, if I cannot give you the exact meaning of the words. This meaning lies hidden within the words: a mediator is not for one, but he studies the interests of both.

VII. It is, then, most clear that A MEDIATOR MUST HAVE TWO PARTIES TO DEAL WITH, or else his office is a mere name. An umpire is chosen to keep order between two sets of people; but if only one set shall put in an appearance, you may go home, Mr. Umpire. There is evidently nothing for you to do. "A mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one."

Now, to-night my Lord is here to be a mediator. God is willing to be reconciled to men; but if there be nobody here to be reconciled, if the preaching of to-night has no relation to anybody here, then it is quite clear that the office of Christ cannot be exercised. He cannot be a mediator unless there is a sinner here to be reconciled. Where is he? My Lord the mediator holds his court to-night, and sits here as an ambassador; but what can he do unless I can find him out the other party; unless I can find out the offender, the guilty one; and unless, finding him out, the Spirit of God shall bring him to say, "I wish to be reconciled to God, and I put my case into the hand of the great interposer"? If there is no sinner in the world, then there is no Saviour in the world. How can he save if men are not guilty, and do not need saving? I tell thee, sinner, thou art necessary to Christ's doing any business! A man is a surgeon, and puts a brass-plate outside his door. Go and tell him that there is nobody ill in the parish. Prove to him that within ten miles there is nobody who has so much as a cold or a toothache: the good man may take down his brass-plate,

and go and spend a month in the country. It breaks a doctor up if everybody remains in health. Now, if to-night everybody here has kept God's law, and is innocent, guiltless, and fully at one with God, my Master has no mission here, nor have I. I have no need to speak of him to you, for "they that be whole need not a physician; but they that are sick." Therefore come I forth in the name of the mediator, to ask whether there be not some sinner here who will confess his guilt; some enemy of God, who will ask for peace; some giddy young man who has lived without God until now, who will pray to be reconciled to him. If so, you make work for my Master. You give him something to do in that divine office of mediator, in which he takes such a delight.

And mark you this: in the case of a mediator, or umpire, the more difficult the case, the greater is the honour that comes to him if he can compose it. If there be a very stiff quarrel between you and God, I commend to you my Lord as mediator; for he never failed yet to settle any dispute, and at this time he says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Solomon was great in handling hard matters, but a greater than Solomon is here. If thy life be all in a tangle and a snarl, he can put it straight. If thy differences with God are too solemn and weighty to be stated in words; if they press thy life out of thee, if they rob thee of sleep, if they bring thee down to hell's door; yet still my Lord the mediator can settle every difference, and make peace between thy soul and God. Art thou willing that he should exercise his office for thee? If so, the worse thy case the greater will be the credit that will come to my Lord as mediator, when he has removed every difficulty for thee.

Do not be afraid because there are so many sinful ones here, and such great numbers of you are still the enemies of God. I do not only invite one of you to come, but I would say: Come all, and the more the merrier. My Lord will have the greater honour if he composes this quarrel in hundreds of cases, all varying, but all grievous. You may come, the whole of you, and he will not shut his door against you. If you go to see some eminent doctors of this city, you must get there early in the morning, and wait almost till night before your turn comes round; but there will be no waiting with my Lord and Master. If you wish to be friends with God, the mediator is ready to compose the difference, and to send you away happy in the love of the Most High.

"But may I come?" says one. May you come? When Christ sets up to be a mediator, why should you not use him as a mediator? I do not ask the doctor's pardon when, feeling ill, I knock at his door. He has put up his name as one that is willing to deal with the sick, and therefore I seek him. I take no liberty in coming. If he has undertaken an office, let him do his office. Poor guilty wretch, afraid to come to God, behold Christ puts up the name of mediator with intent that he should be used as such! He is the way of access to the Father. Come and use him for what he professes to be. Believe that he is able to do what, by his name and his official title, he claims to do. Now come, and be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ his Son, the mediator.

I have been nearly forty years now trying to preach. I cannot get at it yet. Oh, that I knew how to put this, so as to move every soul to come to God, and sue for peace! How willing must God be to be at peace with men, when he provides a mediator between himself and them! How readily ought you to come when Christ's honour and glory depend upon men's trusting their cases in his hands! I ask again, what is a mediator if no case is trusted to him? A king without a crown, a shepherd without a flock, a farmer without land, a physician without sick people—these are all in a poor plight. And Christ without sinners, where is he? His name is an empty thing, and his glory gone. Come, then, ye chief of sinners, come to Christ, and leave your case with him!

VIII. But I close by noticing that, although it be necessary, when the mediator begins, that there should be two parties—for he is not a mediator of one, and God is one—yet when the case ends, A MEDIATOR MUST MAKE THE TWO ONE, OR HE HAS NOT SUCCEEDED. Our Lord Jesus has broken down the middle wall of partition. He has really reconciled those who stood apart. Christ has done this for so many that I should like you sitting in the gallery to say, "Why should not he do it for me?" Hung up in Christ's private chamber there is a record of ten thousand quarrels between men and God that he has ended. Why should he not have my name among them? Why should he not end the quarrel between me and God? Why should he not reconcile me to the Father, so that the Father should give me the kiss of peace? He has never failed in a case yet. Some of the very worst cases have been submitted to his umpireship; but he has always succeeded. They know not in heaven of a single defeat of our Lord; and the gloomy shades of hell cannot reveal a single failure on the part of Christ, in the case of one poor, condemned, guilty soul, that came to him and said, "Make my peace with God." He was never obliged to say, "I cannot do it." There is no such instance. Come, my friend, if thou hast lived to be eighty, an enemy to God, thou mayest yet become his friend through this mediator! Come, my hearer, if thou be young and full of vigour, and if thy passions have led thee far away from purity, so that God may well quarrel with thee, thou mayest come at once, just as thou art, and Christ will make up the quarrel between thee and God! His pardoning blood can take away the guilt that angers God; and the water which flowed with the blood from his dear pierced side can take away the propensity to rebellion within thine own bosom. Surely I ought, by such words as these, to comfort some souls, and lead them to Jesus.

Reconciliation, wrought out by Christ, is absolutely perfect. It means eternal life. O my hearer, if Jesus reconciles thee to God now, thou wilt never quarrel with God again, nor God with thee. If the mediator takes away the ground of feud—thy sin and sinfulness—he will take it away for ever. He will cast your iniquities into the depths of the sea, blotting out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your transgressions. He will make such peace between you and God that he will love you for ever, and you will love him for ever; and nothing shall separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. I have heard of some mend-all which so puts the pieces of broken

plates together, that the articles are said to be stronger than they were before they were broken. I know not how that may be. This I know: the union between God and the sinner, reconciled by the blood of Jesus, is closer and stronger than the union between God and unfallen Adam. That was broken by a single stroke; but if Christ join thee to the Father by his own precious blood, he will keep thee there by the inflowing of his grace into thy soul; for who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?

One thing more I have to say. Remember, if you refuse the mediator whom God appoints, you do peremptorily refuse to be at peace with God. *You* could not have found a mediator; you cannot discover another now. There can be no other so every way suitable to come between us and God, as the God-man, Christ Jesus; bleeding on the cross to put away our sin, and risen from the dead to proclaim that we are justified. Now, if God takes out of his own bosom his own Son, and gives him up to die, that he may make peace with us, and we refuse him, we mean endless war with God. That is what it comes to. If you will not have Christ, you are baring your arm for an eternal conflict with the Almighty. You are putting on your helmet, and girding your sword, to fight with your Maker. You are rejecting peace when you reject Christ. I am sure that it is so. You are choosing war with the Lord of hosts. Well, sirs, if you will have it, you must have it; but I would implore you to repent at once of your insane choice. How can you fight with God? Why should you fight with God? To battle with God is to battle against your own best interests, and to ruin your souls. Heaven, the only heaven that a creature can have, is to be at peace with his Creator. There is no peace unto the wicked. How can there be? The only hope that we can have is to be agreed with God. If he has made me, he has made me for a purpose. If I fulfil that purpose, I shall answer the end of my being, and I shall be happy. If I do not fulfil that purpose, I must be unhappy; and in choosing to be the foe of God, I have chosen my own eternal damnation. God help us to repent of such a choice; and may we now lay hold on Christ the mediator, and trust ourselves with him, that he may make peace between us and God; and to his name shall be glory for ever and ever! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Galatians iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—433, 384, 369.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GOD FORGIVING SIN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 6TH, 1890, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."—Isaiah lv. 7—9.

AT first, men have very low ideas of sin. It is a trifle, a mere mistake, a failure of judgment, a little going aside; but when the Holy Spirit begins to deal with them, sin grows to be an intolerable burden, a fearsome thing, full of horror and dismay. The more men know of the evil of sin, the more astounded they are that they ever should have found any pleasure in it, or could have made any excuse for it. Now, it is well when men begin to see the truth about themselves; for even if that truth breaks them into pieces, and grinds them small as the dust of the threshing-floor, it is well that they are delivered from the dominion of falsehood. At this time, however, while the thought of sin becomes clear, the thought of pardon is not at first so clear. Sin is great, and for that reason the sinner thinks it cannot be pardoned, as if he measured the Lord by his sin, and fancied that his sin was greater than the mercy of God. Hence our difficulty with men who are really awakened, is to raise their thoughts of God's mercy in proportion to their raised idea of the greatness of sin. While they do not feel their sin, they say that God is merciful, and talk very flippantly about it, as if pardon were a trifle. But when they feel the weight of sin, then they think it impossible that sin should be forgiven. *In our text God in condescension helps the sinner to believe in pardon by elevating his idea of God.* Because God is infinitely superior to man, he can abundantly pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." He can abundantly pardon, because his nature is not on our level. May God bless what I shall say, and enable doubting ones to have confidence in divine mercy, and at once receive the pardon of our God!

"Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,
A pardon bought with Jesus' blood."

I. YOUR OWN THOUGHTS JUDGE PARDON TO BE IMPOSSIBLE. Let me show you why. To some it seems impossible that there can be forgiveness for them, because of *some special, secret, gross, and grievous sin.* Most persons, when they remember their past lives, see a certain spot blacker than the rest. Perhaps more light falls upon that spot than upon any other, but certainly the eye of memory constantly returns to it; and when they take a view of their lives, they are overwhelmed by the remembrance of certain enormous transgressions. In conversing with enquirers, it has been my painful lot to hear many an awful story, which will never be repeated by me. They weep over sins inexcusable, sins foul and terrible; but oh, it has always been a delight to me to be able to say, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men!" I have never heard in secret of any special action that has seemed to me—even *seemed* to me—to be beyond the reach of grace. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Those convicted of sin, who think their cases heinous beyond all others, are sometimes astonished when we tell them that many such have been forgiven, and remind them how the apostle, after he had mentioned all manner of enormities, says, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed." They fancy Christ only came into the world to save *saints;* but he came into the world to save *sinners.* They imagine that he saves those who think themselves sinners, and are not truly such; but it is not so. Jesus did not come to save sham sinners, but those that have committed real sin, and ought to be ashamed of what they have done. Jesus died for the guilty. Thinkest thou that the ransom paid in his blood on Calvary was for trifling offences? Nay, verily, the infinite One died because enormous sin was to be put away. Believe, then, in a great Saviour for great sinners!

To others the difficulty of pardon seems to lie not so much in some special offence, as in *the number of their sins, and the long continuance of them.* "Look," says one, "I now perceive that I sinned when I did not think I was sinning. I sin in word, I sin in thought, I sin in motive, I sin in spirit; whereas I thought I had but few sins." In your room the air seems clear and pure enough till you let in a beam of sunlight through a hole in the shutter. Look! look! look! Why, dancing up and down in that ray of sunlight there are myriads of objects. So, within the action which appears quite innocent, there may be myriads of evils which are discovered to us by the light of God when the eye of conscience has the scales taken from it. To have lived in sin for twenty, forty, sixty, or eighty years, appears to the awakened conscience to be a very dreadful thing: and a dreadful thing it is. It is cruel to provoke a person for five minutes; to go on provoking him for an hour is abominable; but to provoke God year after year, as sinners do, is a tremendous crime, which might seem to be beyond mercy. So the heart feels, and hence the need for such a text as mine.

Others have been grievously oppressed with the idea that they could not be pardoned because of *the wilfulness of what they have done.* "I did, on such and such an occasion," says one, "distinctly prefer sin to righteousness. I sinned against great light. I had to do violence to

myself to go into evil company, and to commit sin. I sinned by an awful constraint which I put upon my conscience." Certainly this is a very grievous evil. To sin wilfully is dangerous to the last degree. Wilfulness is the very damnableness of sin. Sin committed of malice aforethought, against light and against knowledge, is sin indeed. I do not wonder that you think it impossible that you should be forgiven; but I would have you remember that your judgment is nothing as compared with God's Word; and God's Word declares that if you forsake your way and turn to the Lord, "he will abundantly pardon." Be not astonished when I tell you that you are much worse than you think you are. Even though you have a very terrible idea of yourself, that idea does not come up to the truth. But, notwithstanding this, if you were ten thousand times worse than you are, still God the infinitely merciful is able, for Christ's sake, to forgive you all trespasses, and to blot out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins. Behold, in the name of God I publish this great truth: "He will abundantly pardon."

"Sir," says one, "I sinned *with a great falseness and treachery of heart;* for I was baptized and joined a church. I professed to be a follower of Christ, and I have broken my covenant. I did know something of the salvation of Christ, and I sinned against it. I did rejoice at one time in the light of God's countenance, and I wickedly went astray from him." Yes, this is very, very, very grievous. But there is a text that says: "Return, O backsliding daughter"; and I cannot go further until I have sounded it in your ear. May the Spirit of God send it into your heart! "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from them." "He will abundantly pardon"; for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are his ways higher than your ways.

I hear one say, "But, sir, there is about my sin this peculiar heinousness, that *I have injured myself and others by my sin.*" Many a man has to carry in his bones the sins of his youth; and though the physical consequences may not be averted, yet I would have him trust in Christ, that the guilt is, notwithstanding, blotted out. We may lead another into sin, and that other may perish; and yet, amazing grace, we may be saved. When David was forgiven, he could not restore Uriah to life, who had been slain through his wicked device. Worst of all, we may have led another into hell. "Oh," says one, "if I have damned another, can I yet be saved myself?" Yes, yes; but as I say it, I feel inclined to stop and ask you to sing,

> "Who is a pardoning God like thee,
> Or who hath grace so rich and free?"

We cannot undo the mischief of our ungodly lives. The drunkard may become as sober as he pleases, but he cannot bring back those young lads whom he taught to drink. The man who was an unbeliever, and who spoke against God and his Christ, may turn and repent, and be a faithful follower of Jesus; but the wicked things he taught may still linger in many minds, and go on poisoning them to their destruction. Sin is a spreading plague. It is a horrible evil; and were it not for the cross, it would be a despairing business to talk

with sinful souls; but the cross, the cross, it rises high above all the hills of sin, and they that look to it shall find that God doth abundantly pardon.

Perhaps one may even say, "But, sir, my sin was of this kind, that *I dishonoured God:* I denied the Deity of Christ. I used to grow red in the face against God's electing love, and justification by faith. I hated the gospel, and I said all manner of contemptuous things about God's servants, and about God himself." It is a sorrowful case, my friend; but remember, there was one who was a persecutor and injurious. But he says, "I obtained mercy." When you hear the cock crow to-morrow morning, remember how Peter was forgiven, and hope for mercy. Though sinners have defamed him and blasphemed him, profaned his day and hated his gospel, Jesus can wash them whiter than snow. It is mine to proclaim at this time pardon for every form of transgression and iniquity. David said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight"; and though you may be compelled to feel that your sin is peculiarly of that kind, yet the Lord will abundantly pardon; for, says he, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

II. But, secondly, GOD'S THOUGHTS OF OTHER THINGS ARE FAR ABOVE YOURS.

I am not going to keep you long on that. It is quite certain that the best thoughts—the most logical thoughts, the most original thoughts, the most correct thoughts you have ever had—are not worthy to be compared with God's thoughts. Now, look in *nature*. The things you see in nature were, at first, thoughts in God's mind, and he embodied them. Did you ever think such thoughts as God has thought in creation? You take the wing of a fly, an insignificant thing, and simple enough: but you put it under a microscope and you see it to be a fabric of great beauty, of exquisite delicacy, and of marvellous adaptation to the end for which it was made. Many a person who has looked in a microscope has been overwhelmed with wonder. You put a needle under it, the best Redditch needle, and it is a rough bar of iron; but you take any of the works of God, and magnify them as much as ever you will, you never detect any roughness. Nothing can be better finished than God's little things; even in minute matters his thoughts are not as your thoughts. You fancy that you are so insignificant that he will not forgive you. Oh, but he that spends infinite wisdom upon the wing of a fly will care for you, and spend infinite thought upon you, that he may forgive you. You look up at the stars, and your thoughts are that they are mere points of light. His thoughts are not your thoughts; for when you look through the telescope you discover that these are majestic orbs, and you can hardly get God's great thought of the heavens into your head. An astronomer is compelled to worship. He is unable to compass the stupendous thoughts of the creating God. God's great thoughts in nature are infinitely above our noblest conceptions.

God's thoughts in *Providence*—how wonderfully they are above ours! You read history, and everything seems to be a tangle. The stories of

the nations look like "confusion worse confounded"; and yet, before you have read through the chapter, you see in it all a plan and a method—

> "From seeming evil still educing good,
> And better still, and better still,
> In infinite progression."

God works wonderfully in providence, in ways that we look not for. His thoughts are above our thoughts.

It has even been so in your own mind as to *the future*. Read the prophecies, and see what is yet to be. God's thoughts about a new heaven and a new earth—how far above ours! The book of Revelation, which gives us parts of God's thought about the future, is not to be understood by us as yet. We have to wait till facts explain it; for God's thoughts are above our thoughts. Why, take a simple matter like the resurrection of the dead. We bury the departed, and their bodies are dissolved. God's thought is that they shall rise again. The seed shall become the flower. God's thoughts are far above any thoughts that can arise in your soul.

III. I merely throw that in as an interjectory head, to come to this —that HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT PARDON ARE ABOVE YOURS. God's ways of pardon are far above anything you can ever compass. Look at yourself. *Are you not slow to forgive?* Some are sadly slow! It is a long time before they can get over an injury. God forgives readily. Through the death of his dear Son he is able, without the violation of his justice, to forgive at once, freely, readily. There are no compulsions with him: "He delighteth in mercy." It is his very self to pardon; for God is love. Do not judge God's heart by that hard heart of yours. He is a God ready to pardon.

You come to an end of your forgiveness before long. After being offended seven times, you do not go on to seventy times seven. If you did so, surely you would make a great wonder of it, and think that you deserved great praise. But God goes on to seventy times seventy times—on, and on, and on, and never comes to the end of pardoning mercy so long as a soul cries to him for forgiveness.

Some things you find it hard to forgive. You say, "Well, now—now, this is really very provoking. I am of a forgiving spirit, and I have overlooked offences a great many times, but you do not expect me to endure such treatment as this? Surely, nobody can expect me to be always trodden on." No, nobody does expect it of you, and if he did he would be disappointed. God does far more in the way of pardon than we ask, or even think. He stickleth not at great offences; but as soon as we cry to him for pardon, he answers with forgiveness.

I am afraid I must say of some of you that *you forgive, but you do not forget.* Now, God promises to forget our iniquities. It is more than omniscience can do to forget; and yet God declares that he does forget. "I will cast all their sins behind my back," saith he. "I will cast their iniquities into the depths of the sea. They shall not be remembered against them any more for ever."

We forgive, and yet feel some returns of anger. You forgive, and mean it; but there are times when you get chewing over the old offence, and you feel grieved again. The offence sticks in your throat, does it

not? It floats up again, though you thought you had drowned it. But it is never so with God; there are no back reckonings with the All-merciful. "I have blotted out," says he, "thy transgressions." Once blotted out, they are done with for ever. "The day cometh, saith the Lord, when the sins of Judah shall be sought for, and shall not be found, yea, they shall not be, saith the Lord." He has annihilated our sins. Is it not written, "He hath made an end of sin"?

Dear friend, I do not slander you when I say that you are *not very eager to pardon*. Are you? When you have been offended, you think a good deal of yourself, if, after persuasion and humble apology, you are ready to give your hand to the aggressor, and end the dispute. You are not pining to forgive; but God is. It is he, the offended one, who seeks the offender, and proposes to make peace with him. It is he that cries, "Hold," and bids transgressors come to him; yea, pleads with them—"Be ye reconciled to God." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

Do you think that any of us would suffer much for the sake of being able to forgive another? "No," you say, "I do not see that I ought to suffer for his wrong. I will forgive him if I can do so freely; but I could not consent to be a loser thereby." Should there be a very serious difficulty in the way, so that you cannot rightly forgive without some atonement being made, would you make the atonement yourself? You exclaim with astonishment, "*I* make the atonement! How can you propose such a thing?" Some time ago, a case did occur in which I tried to imitate the Saviour, and did so with a measure of success. Two brethren had greatly grieved each other. One had acted very shamefully. I entreated the other to forgive him, and as he did not feel willing to do so, I said, "There are certain consequences involved in what he has done. I will bear all those consequences, and you may regard me as the guilty party if you please." Well, he said he could not be angry with me, because I had done no wrong. However, I did bear the consequences of the wrong action, and thus I made peace between the two. The aggrieved brother was able, by my interposition, to overlook the injury, and yet to keep his word; but he regretted that I should be the scapegoat, until I assured him I was pleased to do it, that I might bring them together again. It would not have been wise for me to ask the offended brother to suffer himself the consequences of the other's offences; but this is what God has done. The consequences of our sin he bears; and Jesus dies because our sin involved death. Miracle of mercy!

> "Who is a pardoning God like thee,
> Or who has grace so rich and free?"

All this was done because all the wisdom of God had been engaged to find out the way of doing it: *you and I do not thus plot and plan how to forgive*. If God were freely to forgive sin without atonement, it would not manifest his love so much as does that plan by which he, in the person of his Son, himself suffered in our stead, that we might be reconciled to God. If I can end a quarrel as soon as I speak a

word, there is little in it; but if it needs plotting and planning and contriving, to make a way by which my pardoning the offender will not cause him to offend again, or will not lead other members of the family to think lightly of his offence, and will prevent any mischief coming from the freeness of my pardon to him, then you see how I love. And if it comes to this—that I must die myself before I can, without damage, freely forgive the offender; and if I do die myself for him, herein is love amazing—love beyond degree! O souls, you that are listening to me now, and think that God cannot forgive you, I hope that all this is sufficient to make you feel that you have made a mistake! You have measured God's corn with your own bushel. He is greater at forgiving than ever you dreamed. Oh, he is a great forgiver! Wonderful is God in every position which he assumes; but when he takes to pardoning through the bleeding sacrifice, then is he glorious indeed. The silver sceptre is the most majestic ensign of his royalty.

IV. I might finish here, but I wanted to say, had there been time, that GOD'S THOUGHTS ARE ABOVE YOURS IN ALL THINGS WHICH CONCERN HIS GRACE. Would you mind reading the chapter through again? Just see the very first verse as to the freeness of his grace. Your thought is that you can get nothing without paying for it: God's thoughts are, "Come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." But you think that if God were to save you he would perform it in a second-rate style. Not he! He will have no niggard salvations. If he supplies his people, it shall be most richly and freely. Listen to this: "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." It is not a sip of the water, or a crust of the bread, or a drop of the milk; but when Christ invites poor sinners to come, he invites them to a high festival. You that are the guiltiest may come to Christ, and be among the happiest and the best of his saints. Nobody would ever imagine that a sinner could ever enter into covenant with God—that God should strike hands with guilty men, and pledge himself to grace. Listen to this: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." I remember a man, shut up in prison, under a long sentence, and he was so violent that he was put into a solitary cell. The chaplain had done all he could as to bringing him to repentance; but one day he read to him this verse: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you." The man said, "I never heard of such a thing. Can God make a covenant with such a wretch as I am? Sir," said he, "it will break my heart"; and it did break his heart, and he became a new man in Christ Jesus under the power of that amazing thought, that God would enter into covenant with such a wretch as he was.

Ah, well! I know your thoughts, poor sinner! You think that if Christ will save you, yet he will never get much glory out of you! Listen! This is his glory, that he should call a nation that he knows not, and people that know not him should run to him. He mentions a people who were so bad that our Lord himself did not know them,

a people so ignorant that for certain they did not know him. This is to be his glory, that he is to call them by his grace: "For he hath glorified thee." There's a thought! It is not one of *your* thoughts, but one of the thoughts of God—that he will glorify Christ in the saving of great sinners.

"Ah, well!" says one, "I will go home, and cry to God for mercy." That is *your* thought. Listen to God's thought. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Breathe a prayer to him *now*. Look to Jesus with the eye of faith at once! The Lord help you so to do! Your thought is that salvation is to be won through months or years of labour and prayer. But pardon is given as quick as a lightning flash. The sin is there! The sin is gone! The dead soul lives! The lost soul is saved! While I speak the word, it is done, and God is glorified thereby.

Ah! still you think, "How can I be pardoned?" Listen to this: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Read the rest of the chapter, and say to yourself, over each verse, "This was not my thought; this was not my way." End all your doubts with the last verse: "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Ah, my God! this is not my way, and this is not my thought.

"Who is a pardoning God like thee,
Or who hath grace so rich and free?"

The Lord bring all of you, who are not saved as yet, to believe unto eternal life! And you that are his people, I beseech you, pray God to bless this word for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah lv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—537, 512, 202.

END OF VOLUME XXXVI.

Permitted to complete thirty-six years of consecutive sermons, the full heart of the preacher exclaims, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" The spring has never ceased to flow. The Bible seems fuller, and more rich in subjects now than when we began to select themes from it. A few beauties here and there are all that we have been able to depict, of "thy land, O Immanuel!" We have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God; but that "whole counsel" is, in its fulness, as much beyond us as the sea surpasses the hollow of a child's hand. Yet has God set his seal upon our testimony in many conversions, and edifications. Above all, to him be glory, that an afflicted and poor people, detained from public services, have by these sermons been refreshed. So may it be while this pulpit remains! "Brethren, pray for us."—C. H. S.

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